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Teachers' Perspectives of Low Student Achievement Within Social Promotion Practices

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MA, Peru State College, 2006

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Researchers have reported the positive and negative effects of social promotion and retention. The problem at a large elementary school in the southeastern United States was inadequate achievement scores of 70% of socially promoted students in grades 3 through 5 on mandated state tests. The purpose of this case study was to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion, grade retention, and how to improve achievement in grades 3 through 5. Tomlinson's differentiated instruction was used as the conceptual framework. Twelve teachers from Grades 3 through 5, who had been at the school at least 1 year and represented each grade and core subject area, were interviewed and their related lesson plans were reviewed. Research questions addressed teachers' perspectives about low achievement of socially promoted and retained students' academic achievement, methods including differentiated instruction that teachers used with socially promoted students, and what teachers thought could be done to improve achievement for socially promoted and retained students. Data were coded inductively. The resulting themes were that (a) students were too far behind academically at socially promoted levels so teachers preferred retention over social promotion, and (b) teachers felt differentiated instruction, within small groups, would be helpful, but found little time to use it. The implications for social change are development of a policy of social promotion that will help teachers better meet the needs of students and provide professional development to help teachers improve implementation of differentiated instruction with a goal of increasing achievement for all students.

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Dedication

This page is dedicated to my children: Khaien, Kheann, and K'ennaiya Connor and my parents, Edgar & Zulah Hodge. To my children, thank you all for your patience as I completed my doctoral studies. To my parents, thank you both for your encouragement to persevere to fulfill my dreams. And to Dave "Lil Wil" Williams, you came in towards the end of this journey, and I thank you for being there for me. I love you.

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Table of Contents

i

iv

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

A problem within a local U.S. school in southeastern Georgia is inadequate academic progress of socially promoted students. If students have not met the requirements of expected test score levels, they will either be retained or socially promoted. Socially promoted students are students who have been promoted from one grade to the next grade without acquiring the necessary basic skills for being successful in the subsequent grade (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). The practice of requiring a certain score to pass to a higher grade in the United States has led to increasing numbers of students retained each year who are older than other students in the grade in which they are enrolled (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Stakeholders became concerned about older students being held back with younger students, so students were often socially promoted even though they did not reach a certain level on the tests (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). To counter this, teachers, parents, and administrators have decided that students should be advanced; thus, student social promotion has become the solution in many U.S. schools (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). In the local school for this study, low achievement of socially promoted students has become a concern for teachers and administrators; concern over inadequate academic progress of socially promoted students is the focus of this study.

For the focus school, although there are students who are achieving academically, there are many who are not achieving satisfactorily. Students who are not meeting the required passing proficient score of 800 or above on the state Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) for the school years 2011-2013 in reading, math, language

arts, social studies, and science are considered to be inadequately progressing. Students are also considered inadequately progressing if they did not obtain a score of proficient or distinguished on the Georgia Milestone Assessment System (GMAS) for the school year 2014-2016 in language arts, math, social studies, and science. However, the students who are not achieving academically are socially promoted even though scores indicate lack of mastery grade level expectations (School of Focus Records, 2015).

The school of focus is not the only location where social promotion poses a problem. For example, Winters and Greene (2012) found Florida schools reported that students who lacked basic skills and were socially promoted appeared to fall farther behind over time as they were continually socially promoted. The authors also concluded that students who were retained made significant academic gains from the first year in a grade to the second year in the same grade when retained. This study suggests that retention may help low achievers better than social promotion.

In Section 1, I present the framework of this qualitative study that was used to address teacher perspectives on student social promotion and grade retention and the efforts to improve student achievement. This section will also contain a thorough explanation of the problem, the theoretical framework, and related literature.

Description of the Setting

The local problem that prompted this study exists in a large southeastern school district in Georgia. The elementary school of focus has a student population of 806 students with the following ethnic composition: 80% Black, 10% Hispanic, 6% Asian/Pacific Indian, 3% White, and 2% Other. The school is identified as a Title One

school because 63% of the students are from low income families who receive free or reduced lunch (School of Focus Records, 2016). In addition, the school consists of various certified employees including a principal, assistant principal, counselor, two instructional facilitators, six kindergarten teachers, six first-grade teachers, six second-grade teachers, six third-grade teachers, five fourth-grade teachers, and five fifth-grade teachers. Other certified employees include eight special education teachers, one teacher for gifted classes, two English of Speakers of Other Languages teachers, and the special subjects teachers such as art, physical education, and music (School of Focus Records, 2016).

Definition of the Problem

The local problem that prompted this study was low achieving students who are socially promoted on a recurring basis from school year to school year regardless of mastering the curriculum content. The concern is what happens to these students as they are continually socially promoted. They might be having difficulty keeping up with the grade level curriculum expectations, and perhaps they should have been retained instead. What is being done to aid these students so they may succeed? These socially promoted students include students who were not eligible for special education yet could benefit from another year to learn the expected curriculum. However, there is a gap in the practice of addressing these students' needs. Students who are socially promoted often have trouble progressing each time they are socially promoted because they have missed pertinent curriculum information they should have acquired in the previous years.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The students who have been socially promoted at the focus school are students

who are behind academically in their current grade level in one or more subjects (School

of Focus Records, 2015). Table 1 provides an example of the number of students per

subject area who did not attain a proficient score of 800 and above on the Georgia CRCT

in the subject areas of reading, language arts, math, social studies, or science and who

were socially promoted during the school years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014.

Table 1

Percentage of Nonproficient Students Promoted Based on the Georgia Criterion
Competency Standardized Tests in Focus School

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (reading)	10%	11%	10%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	7%	13%	15%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	24%	23%	31%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	28%	30%	32%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies)	30%	29%	24%

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

In 2014, board members in the state of Georgia reconstructed the state

standardized test to become the GMAS in order to measure how well students have

learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in

English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Table 2 provides

information of the percentage of students per subject area in Grades 3, 4, and 5 who did

not obtain a proficient or distinguished score on the GMAS during school year 2014-

2015 and 2015-2016 for the subject areas of language arts, math, social studies, and

science and were socially promoted. Table 2 demonstrates the high level of socially

promoted students who, by definition, had not achieved proficiency of grade level

expectations; 75% of nonproficient students being socially promoted in 2015-2016

indicates a possible impact on classroom instruction requiring extra support for the

nonproficient students.

Table 2

*Percentage of Nonproficient Students Socially Promoted Based on the Georgia
Milestones Assessment System in Focus School*

	2014-2015	2015-2016
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	71%	75%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	80%	85%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	78%	84%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies)	87%	82%

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The school of focus is not the only location where social promotion poses a

problem. Research includes other settings where social promotion has been declared to be

a problem. For example, Hennick (2008) presented the description of a teacher, Sarah Siegel, who was experiencing difficulties with social promotion of students (as cited in Yonke, 2012). Siegel was a teacher at a large public school in Atlanta, Georgia, who walked into an eighth-grade classroom where only one-fifth of the students could read and write at grade level (Hennick, 2008). Seigel suggested that this problem began in the early grades and got worse as the time went on. Siegel indicated that she knew of first grade teachers who justified socially promoting students because they achieved on part of the grade requirements (Hennick, 2008). However, if a student in the first grade only partially learned the alphabet, sight words, and phonics, it is going to affect them in the future (Yonke, 2012). This situation symbolizes the ongoing problem of social promotion.

Another aspect of concern with social promotion is the effect it may have on students' attitudes. An example of this was reported by Berlin (2008), who described a student who seemed capable but was not applying himself in the seventh grade. Due to his lack of progress, the teacher threatened retention; however, the student still refused to work. The teacher concluded that the student had figured he did not need to work because he would be socially promoted to the next grade regardless of his level of work (Berlin, 2008). Therefore, this type of behavior could be influencing students at the school of focus.

Research also includes views of students and parents on retention. Anderson and West (1992) gathered the feelings and reactions of students who had been retained. The study was conducted in different schools with 52 students from 22 different families who

were retained at least once. Participants reported that they felt that grade level retention was vital although they would not like for their family member to be retained. On the other hand, there were parents who felt that retention assisted their children in making progress in school (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Based on this study, there are parents and students of retention who support retention, rather than social promotion, but not necessarily for their own family.

Additional researchers have studied the issue of retention from teachers' and principals' perspectives. Range, Holt, Pijanowski, and Young (2012) surveyed 206 primary grade teachers and 39 elementary principals to investigate their reasoning on retention. The teachers and principals thought that students should be retained if their academic performance was poor. More teachers than principals concurred that if students are retained when necessary it can help prevent future failure of students (Range et al., 2012). Though more teachers than principals favored grade retention, the educators felt that parental involvement was an effective method to curb grade retention.

Although there are those who oppose social promotion, there are others who support it. Schnurr, Kundert, and Nickerson (2009) examined retention decision-making practices as well as school psychologists' knowledge, beliefs, and opinions regarding retention. The participants of this study included 250 psychologists who were randomly selected from the membership of the National Association of School Psychologists. Schnurr et al. determined that in general the school psychologists did not support retention and did not find it effective because there is a gap between school psychologists' knowledge of the literature and continued beliefs in common retention

myths. The school psychologists would prefer to contribute to the development of more appropriate interventions that would reduce the need to consider retaining a student (Andrews, 2016; Schnurr et al., 2009). Unlike the other research studies previously presented, this study supports social promotion and opposes retention.

Literature related to social promotion and retention includes differing perspectives. Yonke (2012), Berlin (2008), and Hernandez-Tutop (2012) provided views of how social promotion negatively impacted students' education. Range et al. (2012) reported diverging views among the teachers and administrators with teachers more than principals being against social promotion. On the other hand, Andrews (2016) discussed how psychologists supported social promotion. With the various opinions for and against social promotion in mind, the purpose of this research study was to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and its alternative, grade retention in Grades 3 through 5, and what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school.

Rationale

The main goal of this study was addressing the fact that social promotion has not resulted in improved achievement for low achieving students at the focus school and has become a widespread problem for parents, students, and teachers (Principal, personal communication, January 22, 2015). The National Education Association (NEA, 2014) reported that socially promoted students are problematic for parents because having a child socially promoted suggests that their child is adequately prepared to be successful in school as their child progresses from grade to grade. The NEA added that socially

promoted students are problematic for other students because social promotion suggests

that it is not necessary to be successful in school because they will be promoted anyway.

In addition, the NEA suggested that social promotion communicates to other students that

their achievement and effort do not count (2014). Socially promoted students within a

classroom are also problematic because teachers have to prepare lessons to teach students

in a classroom with varying levels of skills and knowledge in various subject areas (NEA,

2014). In addition to teaching challenges, teachers feel frustrated in expecting hard work

from students who are performing below grade level because the work may be too

difficult (NEA, 2014).

If socially promoted students continue to be promoted and do not progress,

parents, students, and teachers will all continue to be affected. This situation has

heightened concern about the school's social promotion policy. For example, in the

second grade, there are students who are performing at kindergarten level, and in third

grade, some students are performing at a kindergarten or first grade level; this pattern

continues in fourth and fifth grades (Assistant Principal, personal communication,

October 10, 2014). Teachers at the school of focus have expressed their concerns about

socially promoted students. For example, one third-grade teacher indicated that there are

socially promoted students in her class who do not know their letter sounds and she

questioned how they could have advanced this far. She expressed her frustration because

she has over 30 students in her class: "How am I to meet the socially promoted students'

needs and cater to the other students' needs at the same time?" (Third-grade Teacher,

personal communication, November 22, 2013). A fifth-grade teacher reported difficulties

with numerous socially promoted students who, she explained, should know basic math facts, yet "cannot add, much less multiply" (Fifth-grade Teacher, personal communication, November 22, 2013). This teacher added that "in order to successfully achieve fifth grade curriculum, it is impossible for teachers to go back and reteach all the students have missed or did not achieve in previous grades" (Fifth-grade Teacher, personal communication, November 22, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school.

Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 display data from school years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016. The data displayed are the percentages of students who were nonproficient on the CRCT and GMAS in the subject areas of reading, language arts, math, social studies, and science at the focus school, the district, and the state. In between some of the years, the data fluctuated among the subject areas during different school years. However, by school year 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 the percentage of nonproficient students in all subject areas increased; therefore, a percentage of students advanced to the next grade without having the required content knowledge to succeed in the next grade.

Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 indicate percentages of students socially promoted at the focus school were higher than the state but usually less than at the district level. Tables 3, 4, and 5 display the percentages of students who were nonproficient and socially promoted in the focus school, district, and state during the school years between 2011

through 2016. Although the numbers fluctuate, there still has been a steady increase of

nonproficient students throughout those years.

Table 3

Percentage of Nonproficient Students Socially Promoted Based on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test in Focus School, District, and State for 2011-2012

	Focus school	District	State
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (reading)	10.5%	16.5%	9.2%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	7.3%	14.3%	8.1%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	24.3%	29.4%	18.4%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	27.8%	31.3%	21%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies)	29.5%	34.1%	21.3%

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

Table 4

Percentage of Nonproficient Students Socially Promoted Based on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test in Focus School, District, and State for 2012-2013

	Focus school	District	State
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (reading)	10.7%	13.0%	7.5%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	12.2%	15.4%	9.2%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	22.3%	25.5%	15.9%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	29.1%	29.1%	19.8%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies)	29.6%	30.9%	18.3%

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

Table 5

Percentage of Nonproficient Students Socially Promoted Based on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test in Focus School, District, and State for 2013-2014

	Focus school	District	State
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (reading)	9.9%	11.4%	6.4%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	14.7%	16.7%	9.4%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	30.9%	30.8%	16.6%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	32.1%	31.3%	20%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies)	24.4%	28.4%	18.1%

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

Table 6 includes scores from the 2014-2015 school year demonstrating that there was an increase of nonproficient socially promoted students from the previous years in all tested subject areas. The local school percentages of nonproficient socially promoted students exceeds those of the state but are similar to the district.

Table 6

Percentage of Nonproficient Students Socially Promoted Based on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System in Focus School, District, and State for 2014-2015

	Focus school	District	State
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	70.8%	76%	61.9%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	80.2%	80.8%	61.2%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	77.8%	81.2%	65.3%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies)	87.1%	83.7%	68.8%

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

Table 7 includes scores from Grades 3, 4, and 5 for the 2015-2016 school year that indicates there was an increase of nonproficient socially promoted students from the previous years in all tested subject areas except social studies. In addition, the percentage of students who were nonproficient were higher in the focus school than in the district and state in all subject areas except social studies.

Table 7

Percentage of Nonproficient Students Socially Promoted Based on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test in Focus School, District, and State for 2015-2016

	Focus school	District	State
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (language arts)	78.8%	77.9%	64.8%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (math)	81.6%	79.2%	62.2%
Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (science)	81.9%	80.8%	60.6%

| Third, fourth, and fifth grade nonproficient socially promoted students (social studies) | 77.6% | 82.5% | 68.2% |

Note. Department of Georgia Website, 2016.

Although the numbers fluctuate, there still has been a steady increase of nonproficient students throughout the years. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school.

Definition of Terms

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Adopted by the state and designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that young people need for success in college and careers (Common Core State Standards, 2014).

Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT): Designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the state mandated content standards in reading, English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

Differentiated instruction: A method of instruction developed to enable teachers to plan strategically in order to meet the needs of the diverse learners in a classroom. (De Jesus, 2012)

Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS): A comprehensive assessment system that spans Grade 3 through high school and is used to measure how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in

English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

Grade retention: The process in which children are held back in a grade, preventing them from being promoted with their peers (Powell, 2010)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): The current incarnation of President Lyndon Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, whose purpose was to raise achievement and close achievement gaps (NEA, 2014).

Social promotion: The practice of sending students to the next grade regardless of whether they meet grade level expectations (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012).

Significance of the Study

Student social promotion with lack of academic progress is a widespread problem within classrooms at the school of focus. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data, one in six children who were not reading proficiently in the third grade failed to graduate from high school (Balkcom, 2014). This information supports the importance of this study to further improve achievement of socially promoted students in elementary school. With the increasing level of nonproficient learners being socially promoted, teachers are concerned about meeting the needs of all students. In this study, the original contributions I aim to make in the school of focus is finding methods to remedy the gap in practice that may improve student achievement for students who are low achieving and socially promoted. The issue of social promotion deserves the exploration of the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and to determine what teachers think can be done to

improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school. The implication for social change is addressing the policy of social promotion and helping teachers improve student achievement.

Guiding/Research Questions

Social promotion has been identified as a problem by teachers in the school of focus. Many students are low achieving and are being socially promoted rather than retained. Due to this situation, teachers are required to try to accelerate students, who are currently functioning behind their current grade level, by helping them increase learning so they will test on grade level. This requires extra preparation and instruction by the teacher. Differentiated instruction is one method for attempting to support students at various functioning levels.

Researchers of social promotion and grade retention have reported different results. Yonke (2012) indicated that students who are socially promoted without reaching appropriate achievement levels can present many problems for school progress. For instance, students may realize that they will be promoted anyway and continue to avoid doing acceptable work. Hernandez-Tutop (2012) also reported that there are students, when threatened with the possibility of retention, fulfill the requirements to be promoted to the next grade without having to be socially promoted. Andrews (2016) concluded that students who were retained posed emotional problems later in life causing them to drop out of school. Therefore, this research is important to address the issue of achievement of socially promoted students. The purpose of the study was to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think

can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are teachers' perspectives about low achievement of socially promoted students at the focus school?

RQ2: What are teachers' perspectives of retained students' academic achievement at the focus school?

RQ3: What methods do teachers use with socially promoted students and what do teachers think can be done to improve achievement for socially promoted and retained students?

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I introduce the theoretical framework of the study, the history of social promotion and retention, research about these processes, and what researchers have reported to improve academic achievement of elementary students including those socially promoted or retained. I obtained information from various databases such as Thoreau database, and Education Research Complete in the Walden library. I also searched the latest 5 years in the following academic journals: *American Educational Research Journal, American Journal of Education, Educational Administration Quarterly, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Educational Researcher, Educational Research Technology and Development, Harvard Educational Review, Journal of Educational Psychology, Journal of School Leadership, Journal of Teacher Education, Learning and Instruction,* and *Review of Educational Research*. The keywords used to obtain information for the literature review were *social promotion,*

grade retention, child development, classroom makeup, elementary school achievement, low test scores elementary school, differentiated instruction, and *increasing student achievement*.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base for the research study was Tomlinson's (2014) concept of differentiated instruction. According to Tomlinson, differentiated instruction begins with where the student is at academically and not at the beginning of a curriculum guide. Differentiated instruction is a teacher's response to a learner's need guided by general principles of differentiation such as respectful tasks, flexible grouping, and ongoing assessment and adjustment. In differentiated instruction, teachers can differentiate content, process, and product according to the student's readiness, interest, and learning profile through a range of instructional and management strategies such as multiple intelligences informed lessons, tiered lessons, and interest centers. Differentiated instruction, as it relates to social promotion and retention, requires teachers to work with students at each student's potential level for learning.

Tomlinson's (2014) differentiated instruction theory will provide a framework to help me discuss social promotion and retention with the teachers. Tomlinson's differentiated instruction provides a format for teachers to incorporate instructional strategies that will aide struggling socially promoted students or retained students by creating an instructionally responsive classroom. An instructionally responsive classroom will aide socially promoted and retained students by allowing them to have the opportunity to work at a comfortable pace, at an individually challenging degree of

difficulty, in a learning mode that is a good match for their learning profiles, and with applications that are personally intriguing (Tomlinson, 1999). These instructional strategies include stations, agendas, complex instruction, orbital studies, centers, tiered activities, learning contracts, compacting, problem based learning, independent study, group investigations, choice boards, and portfolios. The instructional strategies allow freedom for teachers to move among individual students, coaching and monitoring their understanding and progress. Lastly, within the differentiated instruction model, the teacher can assemble small groups of students who need guided work or direct instruction on a particular skill (Tomlinson, 1999). Therefore, Tomlinson's differentiated instruction theory can be used to improve achievement of low achieving students, specifically socially promoted students within the focus school.

Differentiated Instruction in the Literature

Although differentiated instruction is not new, it has become increasingly important in schools where there is a deficit of students not achieving the highest levels of literacy. Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) investigated what differentiation means and the research base supporting it. Watts-Taffe et al. defined differentiation as allowing students to access the same classroom curriculum by proving entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes tailored to students' learning needs. These authors also discussed recent studies in which there were teachers assigned randomly to teach differentiated reading instruction based on students' reading and vocabulary skills or to provide more effective instruction that was not differentiated during their literacy block (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). The studies resulted that from kindergarten through third grade, the students who

were taught literacy through differentiated instruction such as flexible groping during center or station time, made greater gains in word reading and reading comprehension than students who were taught through quality but primarily whole group instruction.

Teachers can no longer teach a traditional lesson and hope that every student understands (DeJesus, 2012). Research shows students prefer instruction that considers learning modalities (DeJesus, 2012). Some students prefer to learn by seeing, talking in groups with partners, and listening to the instruction, whereas others learn by doing and being involved. In addition, students who are at risk and underachieving need frequent opportunities for mobility such as working stations, options and choices such as variation of tasks, a variety of instructional resources such as graphic organizers and smart boards, sociological grouping such as cooperative learning rather than the traditional routines and patterns (DeJesus, 2012). Therefore, to meet the needs of diverse learners, differentiation should be an option.

The other aspect of differentiated instruction includes the adaptations of instruction made during differentiated instruction (Parsons, Dodman, Burrowbridge, 2013). This form of differentiated instruction is called adaptive teaching. Adaptive teaching is where teachers adjust their instruction in real-time to meet the needs of individual student or the teaching situation regardless of what they had planned. Adaptive teaching allows for moment by moment adaptations to meet the specific needs that are clear during instruction such as needs that could not be anticipated because a teacher cannot account for everything. Because student understanding is complicated, even the most sensitive preassessment can provide limited information. Teachers therefore must

be able to be responsive to unanticipated issues that arise when their differentiated plans are put into action. Adaptive teaching includes monitoring student progress and adapting the instruction based on students' needs and instructional situations.

Little, McCoach, and Reis (2014) examined the effects on reading achievement through the use of differentiated instruction and the elimination of regular reading instruction. They incorporated a multisite cluster-randomized design in four middle schools, which included 2,150 students and 47 teachers. Students were given pretest and posttest data on reading fluency and comprehension to be collected and used to investigate the effects of the differentiated instruction intervention. Little et al. concluded that the differentiated instruction intervention resulted in similar or higher scores in reading fluency and comprehension despite the diminished whole group instruction as compared with regular reading classes.

History of Student Social Promotion

Research of social promotion and retention is mixed. Beginning in the early 19th century, it was common place for students of various ages to be all taught in one large classroom (Carifo & Carey, 2010). However, as time went by and the community population grew, one classroom became inefficient and parents were concerned about the influence the older students would have on younger students (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Due to the growing concerns, graded schools were proposed and formed (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Later, in the 19th century, schools adopted merit promotion in the public school system. Merit promotion involved the most proficient students in the school system (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). At the time, merit promotion was considered positive

because it was an important honor in which the students competed for a diploma regarded as high status. However, at the turn of the 20th century the standards for promotion were no longer important and decreased, allowing social promotion to become the norm because the emphasis shifted from concentrating on more advanced students to ensuring all students moved along (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Throughout the 20th century, students were promoted from grade to grade based on how well they performed on a series of standardized tests. The result of this practice was an increasing number of students retained each year with many students older than normal for the grade in which they were enrolled (Carifio & Carey, 2010). However, parents voiced their concerns about older students mixed in classes with students who were younger (Carifo & Carey, 2010). The solution to the growing grade retention problem was student social promotion (Carifo & Carey, 2010).

Student social promotion became the custom in schools across the country from the 1930s through the end of the 20th century (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Social promotion might have become the custom because, at the time, the main purpose of school was socialization and keeping students in groups with students their age supported that view (Carifo & Carey, 2010). Opposition to social promotion began in the 1950s when academic achievement became education's primary goal. By the early 1970s, efforts were taken to abolish social promotion by implementing standardized tests in New York City, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia . The end of student social promotion was declared in 1998 by President Clinton when he called for an end to the practice (Carifo &

Carey, 2010). By the end of the 20th century, according to federal guidelines, student

social promotion was supposed to be stopped but it was not (Carifo & Carey, 2010).

Opposition to Student Social Promotion

Student social promotion is the practice of sending students to the next grade

regardless of whether they meet grade level expectations. This practice is done to keep

students with their peers and has become common practice of school districts

(Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Although students may not obtain proficient grades in major

courses in order to be promoted to the next grade, teachers as well as parents have

accepted the fact that students have been socially promoted from grade to grade.

Opponents of student social promotion believe that the practice gives students a

misleading view of their learning abilities, frustrates students who are already struggling,

and produces classes where the teacher has to teach unlearned skills to the skill level of

underprepared students at the expense of students with grade-appropriate skills (Carifo &

Carey, 2010). Opponents of student social promotion also contend that student social

promotion lowers expectations and students lose the incentive to work if they know they

will be passed along to the next grade anyway (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Additionally,

when students graduate without the required skills, it damages the students more than the

short-term pain that retention causes. In addition, with socially promoted students in

class, Carifo and Carey (2010) contended, teachers spend more time giving attention to

students who are underprepared for work at the current grade level than addressing grade

level goals. This practice interferes with a teacher's ability to focus on the other students

who are prepared to learn at the current grade level (Lynch, 2014). Opponents of social

promotion also feel students should wait until mastery of the curriculum is attained to better prepare themselves for more advanced work at higher grades, otherwise they may fall even further behind their classmates (King, Orazen, & Paterno, 2015). Opponents of student social promotion oppose it because they think students will achieve better if retained.

According to information obtained from the Anne E. Casey Foundation (Balkcom, 2014), the grade that is the most pivotal in a student's life is third grade because it was determined to be a crucial reading point in a child's education. The Casey Foundation, an activist organization that works to improve lives of children and families, indicated that the focus of learning to read is in kindergarten through third grade and the focus then shifts from learning basic fundamentals of reading to comprehension in the fourth grade (Balkcom, 2014). If children do not have proficient reading skills by third grade, their ability to progress through school and meet grade-level expectations diminishes significantly (Workman, 2014). Whenever third grade students are socially promoted to the fourth grade for social reasons, they may be unable to demonstrate proficiency on the state standardized tests due to reading deficiencies and will not be able to understand what they are reading. NAEP data indicated that one in six children who were not reading proficiently in the third grade failed to graduate from high school (Balkcom, 2014). Additionally, Workman (2014) indicated that students not reading proficiently by third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time or are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, which may lead to high rates of unemployment and increased risk of participation in criminal justice and welfare systems.

More than half the same students who did not graduate from high school on time were not reading proficiently when they were in the third grade (Workman, 2014). A student who does not graduate from high school will have a difficult time succeeding in higher income careers than a student who has graduated from high school (Balkcom, 2014). Therefore, failure to correct reading deficiencies early, as may happen in social promotion situations, can lead to unwanted life-long effects.

In Pakistan, where grade retention rates were high, educators argued for lenient grade promotion or possibly automatic promotion. Due to this situation King, Orazem, and Paterno (2016) conducted a study because it was assumed that grade retention tended to discourage the continuation or persistence in school and that the promotion of students with low achievement would not hamper their ability or their peers' ability to perform at the next level. The researchers concluded that the enrollment decision was significantly influenced by whether learning had taken place and that grade promotion that was uncorrelated with merit had a negative impact on students continuing in school (King, Orazem, & Paterno, 2016).

Positive Effects of Social Promotion

Grade retention, when used as the purpose of improving academic performance, is considered to be faulty by some researchers. For instance, Norton (2011) studied previous research on retention and concluded that "students who were promoted to the next grade level actually learn more than if they have been retained in the same grade" (p. 212). In addition, grade retention has had a negative effect on all areas of student achievement in reading, language, math, and social and emotional adjustment (Norton, 2011). Norton

also stressed that grade retention negatively affected students' self-esteem, social and personal adjustment, and discipline, and retained students had often struggled with many issues such as increased stress, low self-confidence, substance abuse as well as violence in their personal lives. Studies have shown that "students view grade retention as being more degrading and stressful than losing a parent" (Norton, 2011, p. 212). There have been instances in which retained students made initial improvements; however, research studies have indicated that the gains were not sustained and student achievement even in the 2 or 3 years following retention (Norton, 2011). Norton criticized research about social promotion and retention, stating that education cannot cite studies that claim harm from retention because most studies have failed to identify a suitable control group against which to compare retained students, so conclusions are unjustified.

Negative Views of Retention

There are methods of assisting students who have not achieved grade level goals such as grade retention, when a child is held back in a grade, preventing them from being promoted with their peers. Grade retention is used to help students catch up to their performing peers (Dougan & Pijanowski, 2011). Grade retention is also where students repeats a grade if they fail to meet the competency set by grade level expectations (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Additionally, grade retention is where students complete a grade level one year and complete the same grade level the next school year (Peterson & Hughes, 2011). Retained students tend to exhibit academic difficulties and their socio-emotional behaviors are often considered immature (Powell, 2010).

Powell (2010) explained that grade retention is an ineffective strategy to improve academic achievement or increase personal adjustment. He concluded many more males are retained than females and "retention to be one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out of high school, with retained students, 2 to 11 times more likely to drop out of high school than promoted students" (p. 2). Powell (2010) also noted that when grade retention is associated with high school dropouts, it becomes alarming and seems to be the most common deleterious outcome during adolescence. Those opposed to grade retention warn that grade retention causes great harm to students' academic achievement and personal adjustment in their later years.

There are ill effects that are pervasive and serious when retention is used without other support services such as tutoring outside of school and summer school. Some feel retention is used more frequently for certain groups of students such as boys, African Americans, Hispanics and low income students (Education Innovation Institute, 2011). Another issue is that high stakes testing does not usually begin until third grade but by then academic problems that surfaced in earlier grades can snowball by the time test-based policies begin. It is suggested that reading issues should be identified and addressed as early as possible because they become harder to correct as children age, and third grade might be too late (Education Innovation Institute, 2011). Differentiated instruction would also be another method to support retained and socially promoted students.

In agreement with Norton's (2011) review of literature, other critics of grade retention have proposed that retention takes an emotional and social toll on students

(Rose & Schmike, 2012). For instance, Rose and Schmike (2012) claimed that retention

may lead to negative feelings about school as well as a sense of low self-efficacy when it

came to the ability to perform well academically. Socially, some students reported that

being retained was embarrassing and some felt ashamed about being separated from their

age-grade peers. The authors also presented students who had been retained could

become unmotivated and disengaged in school or develop behavior problems such as

bullying, either as a perpetrator or as a victim. Additionally, there was increased

possibility that retained children would eventually end up dropping out. For example, the

authors cited the Chicago Public Schools Achievement Academy, a two year program for

children who have failed to meet promotion criteria, had a dropout rate of 80% (Rose &

Schmike, 2012). Similar to Rose and Schmike (2012), Venable (2015) discussed the

negative aspects of retention from various research studies. For example, she reported,

similar to Norton (2011),that retention had an undesirable effect on self-esteem of

students resulting in frequent absences. Therefore, students tended to not form positive

relationships with their peers and developed an aversion to school. Venable (2015) also

discussed that retention may deter students from having a prosperous life. The author

concluded that retained students were less likely to receive a high school diploma by the

age of 20, received lower wages, and received less favorable job evaluations than

students who had been promoted (Venable, 2015). Additionally, a negative relationship

was found between students who were entering kindergarten one year later than their set

time and the academic achievement of these delayed students was found higher than

students who were not held back (Dougan & Pijanowaski, 2011). These studies'

conclusions that being retained is detrimental to students, supports the notion that social promotion is a better choice.

The effects of retention in first grade on future achievement were studied by Moser, West, and Hughes (2012). This investigation followed two cohorts of students from grade one through five who entered first grade in three school districts in a southwestern state. The eligibility requirements of the research study where the students had to score below the median on a state approved measure of literacy, speak English or Spanish, not be receiving special education services other than speech and language services, and had not been previously retained in first grade. The study consisted of 362 children of which 34% were Hispanics, 34% white, 27% African American, and 4% of another ethnicity. Given the breadth of this sample, the findings should offer important information.

In the Moser et al. (2012) study, data were first collected in the fall of 2000 followed by the fall of 2001. Data included measures of the children's demographic family background, academic and cognitive performances, self-regulation, and social and emotional functioning as well as classroom and school characteristics. This information related to the retention in grade, academic achievement or both. The authors also created propensity scores and predicted probability that a student would be retained in first grade (Moser et al., 2012). The main outcome measures for the study were standardized measures of academic achievement. Achievement was assessed every year beginning in grade 1 and continued until the child completed elementary school (Moser et al., 2012). For the math and reading achievement scores there was an initial advantage for the

students who repeated first grade compared with their promoted first grade peers. However, this effect dissipated by the time students reached the fifth grade. Retained students' math and reading achievement scores were negligibly lower than their promoted peers at fourth grade. The results suggested that had the students who were retained rather than promoted, may have performed as well as the promoted students by the fifth grade. In addition, the effects of retention in subsequent grades indicated, when retained children were compared with their same grade promoted peers, there were no significant drops in math and reading scores (Moser et al., 2012). Thus, retention had no significant effect.

Ritzema and Shaw (2012) conducted a retrospective research study of 142 students, ages 6 to 17 over seven years to examine the effectiveness of grade retention for remediating the academic achievement of students with borderline intellectual functioning compared to students who were also borderline intellectual functioning but who had been promoted. Ritzema and Shaw sought to examine the social and emotional outcomes following grade retention. The participants for the study had been referred by schools or physicians to a hospital-based psycho-educational clinic for school failure, attention problems, or poor performance in school readiness tests and who also received a psycho-educational assessment. The students in the research study were assessed using protocol designed to assess learning disabilities with a test of general cognitive ability included. In the second or third year of the research study, 32 students were retained by the decisions of the school and parents. Students who received general education services and were retained for the first time during years two or three of the study were included

in the study. Data were collected for the year prior to grade retention, students' second year in the retained grade, and the year after grade retention. The academic outcomes were assessed using school grades and the results of individual academic testing using the Woodstock-Johnson Tests of Achievement-II (WJTA-II). Social and emotional outcomes were assessed with the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) (Ritzema & Shaw, 2012). Ritzema and Shaw (2012) concluded that after retention, there were no significant differences in academic performance between the retained and non-retained groups. However, the retained groups were reported to experience significantly more depressive symptoms than the non-retained group. After retention, 26 of the 32 retained students had depressive scores above the clinical cut-off. One year after grade retention, students in the retained group continued to have high levels of depressive symptoms (Ritzema & Shaw, 2012). Although this study included students rated as having borderline intelligence, the results may be instructive about higher functioning students as well.

Grade retention was also studied by Martin (2011) in which he focused on grade retention and its association with academic and non-academic measures. The sample of the study was comprised of 3,261 students in junior high grades, middle high school grades, and senior high school grades from six Australian high schools. All the schools were comprised of mixed-ability students. Overall, 6% of the students reported they were retained at some stage in their schooling. The retained sample was matched with promoted students enabling direct comparison of students with equal ability, age, and gender who were either retained in a grade or promoted (Martin, 2011). Martin (2011)

used assessments of the effects of grade retention which would best be conducted through academic measures of motivation, engagement, and self-concept and non-academic measures including peer relationships and self-esteem. The measure used for motivation was the high school Motivation and Engagement Scale that focuses on adaptive motivation (first order self-efficacy, valuing, mastery orientation, persistence, planning, and task management factors), impeding motivation (first order anxiety, failure avoidance, uncertain control factors), and maladaptive motivation (first order self-handicapping, disengagement factors). Students in the Martin (2011) study were also administered items regarding academic engagement and the notion of self-concept associated with grade retention. These items explored the students' homework completion and time absent from school. Self–concept was measured through the Self-Description Questionnaire II – Short. This scale measured students' ratings of their skills and abilities relevant to school work in general. The non-academic measures of the research study were peer relationships and self-esteem and interactive factors and covariates. Peer relationships were assessed through the same-sex and opposite-sex items from the SDQII-S. Interaction factors and covariates were assessed through the interaction of gender, grade, and ethnicity with retention status in which all were included as single factors. On ethnicity, participants were asked if they spoke English or another language at home (Martin, 2011).

The results of the Martin (2011) study indicated there were significant main effects of grade retention as did Moser et al. (2012). In regard to academic factors, grade retention was a significant negative predictor of academic self-concept and homework

completion, a significant positive predictor of maladaptive motivation and weeks absent from school. In regard to non-academic factors, grade retention displayed as a significant negative predictor of self-esteem but was not significantly associated with peer relationships. Therefore, Martin concluded that grade retention had negative implications for academic motivation, academic engagement, academic self-concept and general self-esteem in high school. Retention in this study was considered to have negative effects. Finally, Tingle, Schoeneberger, and Algozzine (2012) studied the characteristics and consequences of retaining students in elementary and middle schools. Tingle et al. concluded that grade retention should be stopped and, instead purported that schools should develop a method of academic intervention with use of research-based education intervention to provide remedial instruction for students who struggle (Tingle et al. ,, 2012). Differentiating instruction could be considered as part of the intervention.

Positive Views of Retention

Parents generally concede to teachers and school personnel who explain to them that retention is in the best interest of their child (Powell, 2010). Retention in a grade is done so to provide an opportunity for the student to gain a mastery of skills needed in later grades, gain in maturation, and improve personal behaviors required for successful learning performance (Norton, 2011). Explained in this orientation, grade retention is another practice used by school districts with the goal of helping students have more successful academic experiences.

Smith and Ronan-Herzog (2014) provided an excerpt of the experiences of high school seniors who had been held back a grade in elementary school and who planned to

participate in post-secondary education. Most of the students feared they would lose their friends at the time they were retained. However, the students all displayed resiliency, overcame their challenges, and were able to find success in school. Even though several students viewed retention as extending their education, many saw the academic benefits of retention through their own academic achievement. Some factors they reported to help their success included (a) support from their mother, (b) support from their family, (c) academic interventions that were implemented early, (d) extra-curricular activities in high school, and (e) early grade retention (Smith & Ronan-Herzog, 2014).

Lorence (2014), in agreement with Smith and Herzog (2014), found it was beneficial to retain third grade students. The Lorence (2014) study included 38,000 third grade students in Texas and found that year after year the repeating third graders surpassed the students who were socially promoted to the next grade (Lorence, 2014). Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) also reported that retention was beneficial especially to students who were absent excessively during the school year. However, the goal of the school in allowing for retention was to ensure that the student would attend school regularly during their retained year (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). These reports indicate positive benefits of retention when concentrating on academics.

Other perspectives of grade retention were reported from Chicago related to their move to drop social promotion. Stone and Engel (2007) reported about 22 retained students who were examined under Chicago's move to end the student social promotion policy. In this study the students with high levels of instructional support, who altered their learning strategies during the retained year, were more successful academically

(Stone & Engel, 2007). Although from some time in the past, the Stone and Engel report provides important ideas that can inform this study. Likewise, an elementary school on the south side of Chicago touted an example of how the district's grade retention policy could work. For the first year of Mayor Richard Daley's term, his education policy banned student social promotion (Karp, 2011). This resulted in a third of the students retained in the benchmark grades of third, sixth, and eighth. The reason for retention was partly because students were not attending school and the students and parents seemed to not take school seriously. However, with the threat of grade retention an increasing number of students started passing their classes (Karp, 2011). These examples provide insight as to how grade retention can be positive. Changes were made by the education leaders in the state of Florida to follow Chicago implementing a reform policy to end social promotion. This change ensured third grade students were required to pass the state standardized reading exam in third grade in order to be promoted to the fourth grade (Ladner, 2011). Evidence suggested that ending social promotion had a positive impact on student performance (Winters & Greene, 2012). Winters and Greene (2012) evaluated the social promotion policy in Florida's no-social promotion policy after a two year period. They reported that in Florida, students who were retained made noteworthy gains in reading compared to a control group of socially promoted students. The academic benefit was found to have increased the second year following retention (Ladner, 2011). Also, Ladner (2011) concluded the threat of being retained also created a strong incentive for students to improve their test scores in order to proceed to the next grade with their peers. Florida was the first state that, statewide, ended social promotion (Ladner, 2011).

    Winters and Greene (2012) sought to investigate the impact of grade retention on student performance during the first third grade year and two years after. The data used for the study were provided by the Florida Department of Education, which contained test scores for students enrolled in Grades 3 through 10 in a Florida public school from 2001-2002 to 2004-2005 school years. The data included an exclusive identifier for each child, which allowed Winters and Greene to track the students individual performance over a period of time. The authors concluded that the results of this study suggested that students who were involved in Florida's test-based retention policy made noteworthy substantial gains in reading in relation to promoted students (Winters & Greene, 2012). In addition, the policy's influence on reading scores increased over two years consistent with the idea that students who were retained continued to gain ground in reading in relation to students who were promoted in later years as the academic material became more challenging (Winters & Greene, 2012). This is an indication that Florida's retention policy was to increase reading proficiency quite substantially after only two years and it did succeed due to various interventions. The interventions included assigning retained students to high performing teachers, schools were required to develop academic improvement plans for retained students, retained students were required to attend a summer camp where they received literacy instruction, and retained students received an additional ninety minutes of daily reading instruction during the year. The Florida experience demonstrates how retention can be organized to provide for the extra instruction low performing students might need.

Wu, West, and Hughes (2010) investigated the effects of retention in first grade on children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors' such as social acceptance, behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement. This study was a four year longitudinal study involving 124 retained students matched by test scores with 257 promoted students in three schools in school districts in Texas. Students were eligible to participate in the longitudinal study if they scored below the median on a state approved district administered measure of literacy, spoke English or Spanish, were not receiving special education services, and had not been previously retained in first grade. The propensity scores used were demographic measures, cognitive and behavioral performance, social and emotional functioning, and classroom and school variables. Teachers and peers data were collected through questionnaires, beginning when all participants were in first grade. Individual interviews were used to obtain peers' perception of level of externalizing behaviors and children's perceived self-efficacy and sense of belonging.

Wu et al. (2010) concluded that relative to promoted students, students who were retained were found to benefit from retention in both the short and longer terms. Three years after retention, retained children reported higher academic competence than did matched promoted children. Retention had a positive short-term effect on student's perceived school belongingness, and a positive longer term effect on perceived academic self-efficacy. Wu et al. (2010) also concluded that retention had advantages in the short-term, but experienced longer term harmful effects on social acceptance that may lead to the longer term negative effects of retention (Wu et al., 2010). This study demonstrates the dilemma of retention with its sometimes positive and sometimes negative results.

An additional study about retention focused on instruction of retained students. Dombek and Connor (2012) conducted a study on retention for three reasons: (a) to examine whether differentiated instruction designed to meet students' individual literacy learning needs impacted retention rates of first graders, (b) to examine whether there were differences in the literacy instruction provided to students who were retained compared with their matched promoted peers, and (c) to identify other potential student characteristics that might predict retention. The participants of the Dombek and Connor (2012) study came from Florida school districts that were demographically diverse. In all there were 11 schools, 53 teachers, and 815 students who participated during the 2005-2006 school years. The research study used quasi-experimental and experimental designs. In the first target, the study observed rates of retention for students whose schools were matched and randomly assigned to implement the intervention or to wait a year. For targets two and three, students were identified according to who had been promoted but had similar word reading and vocabulary skills and attended the same classroom. This provided a matched promoted group. It could be investigated whether instruction was associated with whether or not a student was retained and began separating whether certain student characteristics might predict decisions or be the result of retention by observing classrooms and assessing students' academic and self-regulation skills at the beginning and at the end of the year (Dombek & Connor, 2012). The inclusion of possible differentiated instruction may be able to inform the proposed study's goal to improve achievement for less advanced students.

The study by Dombek and Connor (2012) yielded mixed results. They concluded that students who received individualized student instruction intervention were less likely to be retained than students who were in control classrooms where less individualization occurred. Students in the control classrooms who were promoted, compared to the students who were retained, were more likely to receive the amount of small-group instruction that have been associated with stronger outcomes overall. In addition, promoted students were more likely to be provided with increasing opportunities to practice reading independently and with peers. This situation found that students who self-regulate at the beginning of the school year, but not at the end of the school year predicted whether or not they would be retained. Lastly, students who were retained were perceived to be less academically competent than their peers who were promoted (Dombek & Connor, 2012). This study again demonstrates the importance of individualized and small-group instruction.

A similar study conducted by Chohan and Qadir (2013) in Pakistan examined the impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of elementary grade students. This study employed a mixed method approach. In the quantitative part of the study, 4th grade students from 42 public schools were taken as the study sample. The students' self-esteem was measured through Urdu translation of the Beck Youth Inventory for Self Concept of Children (Chohan & Qadir, 2013). In the qualitative aspect of the study, the key informants were 12 experienced school teachers teaching in public schools. Semi-structured, open ended interviews were conducted with the participant teachers. The data, which consisted of two sets were collected at the same time and the triangulation of both

types of data were carried out after the data was analyzed completely. Chohan and Qadir (2013) concluded overall that grade retention was found to be highly negative on the self-esteem of the repeaters.

With a goal of exploring how grade retention might obstruct the academic success of non-retained students, Gottfried (2013) evaluated the relationship of retained students and non-retained students in an urban elementary school classroom. He analyzed longitudinal data within the school district of Philadelphia comprised of five cohorts. Individual students' records were linked to teacher and classroom data as well as to school, grade, and year identifiers. Gottfried concluded that the affect of having a greater number of grade-retained peers was harmful to the standardized achievement outcomes of non-retained students. This indicates that schools need to limit the number of retained students per class.

Vandecandelaere, Schmitt, Vanlaar, Fraine, and Van Damme (2014) studied the psychosocial development of kindergarten students compared to students in other kindergarten studies who were equally at risk, but were promoted anyway. The study concluded that there was no harm to kindergarten students who were retained for at-risk children's long-term psycho social development. Instead it was found that relative to equally at risk but continuously promoted children, students who repeated kindergarten benefited from retention with respect to higher levels of peer relations, well-being, and lower levels of hyperactivity, social behavior, and aggression. Also when kindergarten repeaters were compared to students who were promoted but were retained in first grade instead, kindergarten repeaters were found to benefit more from retention with respect to

higher levels of well-being, self-confident, independent behavior, attitude to work, and also lower levels of hyperactivity (Vandecandelaere et al., 2014).

In contrast to Tingle et al. (2012), Johnson (2015) studied archival data from three school districts in Missouri to examine if there was a correlation between grade level retention and improved student achievement in English language arts and math. A *t*-test comparison of student scores on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) from before students were retained and the year after they were retained revealed that students who were retained showed significant gains in academic achievement in both math and English language arts (Johnson, 2015).

Educator's Attitudes Toward Retention

With a focus on educators' attitudes, Range et al. (2012) researched elementary principals' and primary grade teachers' ideas about grade retention. The rationale for the study was to better understand educators' perspectives of grade retention as it was being enacted in the primary grades. Data for the Range et al. (2012) study were collected through a paper survey to measure the respondents' perceptions. There were 332 surveys mailed out, 293 to teachers and 39 to principals. Only 206 teachers and all 39 principals returned the survey. The instrument used for the survey was a revised version of the Teacher Perceptions about Retention Survey (Range et al., 2012). The survey consisted of three sections. The first section provided nine statements concerning reasons for retention and timing of retention in primary grades and rated using a Likert Scale. The second section of the research study questioned teachers and principals what important factor they considered the most important when making the decision to retain a student.

The third section of the survey solicited teachers and principals to rate the effectiveness of interventions utilized to keep struggling students from being retained. The study was conducted in a school district within a state with a mandatory retention statute at the fourth grade. Range et al. (2012) concluded that teachers and principals believed students should be retained because of academic performance. In addition, teachers agreed significantly more than principals that retention helped prevent future failure, maintain standards, and motivate students to attend school. Lastly, teachers and principals perceived a benefit to self-concept when students were retained in the primary grades, mainly kindergarten but did not differ significantly concerning their views about the most appropriate time to retain students (Range et al., 2012). Although many studies have indicated retention in a negative light, this study demonstrated that educators believed students should not be promoted if academic progress was low.

Georgia's Law on Student Social Promotion and Grade Retention

The Georgia Academic Placement and Promotion Policy requires that students in the third grade meet or exceed expectations on the Reading Georgia Milestone Assessment System test (Georgia Department of Education, 2016) in order to be promoted. The policy also requires that fifth grade students meet or exceed expectations on the Reading and Mathematics Georgia Milestone Assessment System tests (Georgia Department of Education, 2016) in order to be promoted. The goal of the law is to ensure students are performing at grade level in the key academic areas before moving on to the next grade level. If a student does not perform at or above grade level on the Reading Georgia Milestone Assessment System test in the third grade and Reading and

Mathematics on the fifth grade Georgia Milestone Assessment System test, the student

must be retested. However, if the student does not meet expectations on the retest, the

parents will be notified of the decision to retain (Georgia Department of Education,

2016). Although, the Academic Placement and Promotion Policy is a part of Georgia

education law, there are school districts in Georgia that are not following this law. Green

(2011) reported in the Journal-*Constitution* that most students in Georgia were promoted

despite what the Georgia law states. For example, in one district, Greene (2011) reported

97% of students who failed the retest or did not take the retest were promoted anyway. In

addition, across the state of Georgia, school districts promoted students who did not take

the retest (Greene, 2011). This lack of inconsistency can be frustrating for teachers who

are trying to deal with various student needs in the classroom.

Social Promotion and Grade Retention In Other States

In 2002, Florida began requiring third grade students to meet at least a Level 2

benchmark (meeting the standards) on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test

(FCAT) reading test in order to be promoted to the fourth grade (Greene, 2011). Florida

restricted the promotion of students in the third grade if they could not read. If the student

could not read, the student would repeat the third grade and receive intensive

interventions until he or she demonstrated the required basic skills needed to be promoted

(Ladner, 2012). The opposition to Florida's new policy resulted in a greater outcry than

the reality that more than "25% of students could not read by the time they entered the

fourth grade" (Greene, 2011). In 2002, Florida ended automatic social promotion for

third grade students who couldn't achieve the satisfactory level (Greene, 2011). By 2011,

"illiteracy in third grade in the state of Florida was down to 16% according to Florida state reading tests" (Greene, 2011). It appears that this policy may have contributed to improved reading scores.

Although Florida's retention policy had been applied, there were opposing views reported. Doug Whittaker, a superintendent of a 16,200 student Charlotte County school district in southwest Florida was opposed to retaining students. He felt retention should not be based on test scores, but based on a team of people making the decision which includes the parents (Robolen, 2012). Another superintendent, Margaret A. Smith, of Florida's 62,000 student in Volusia County reported she would rather not have the retention policy, but felt it had value. Smith expressed her perspective that the retention policy had helped to focus on the significance of the students being able to read well that contributed to students' success in all subjects (Robolen, 2012).

Following the Florida example, Indiana implemented a new retention policy beginning in 2012. New legislature identified third grade retention as a last resort, but would be a consequence beginning in 2012-2013 for any student who did not pass the state's new third grade reading exam. (Robolen, 2012). Results of this change have not been reported. Although reformers face challenges in every state, Florida's reformers advanced their agenda against fierce opposition. Despite the opposition, the academic gains are duly noted especially Florida's disadvantaged students who gained the most (Ladner, 2011).

One of the reforms Florida used was the third grade retention policy to end social promotion. This policy was set up to ensure that third grade students would be able to

pass the FCAT reading exam in order to enter fourth grade. Greene and Winters (2012)

reported that two years after ending social promotion, student performance had improved

and retained Florida students made significant reading gains relative to the control group

of socially promoted students. The retained group of students benefitted academically the

second year. Ladner (2012) reflected on the Greene and Winters data discussed

previously in this paper stating, "students lacking in basic skills who are socially

promoted appear to fall farther behind over time, whereas retained students appear to be

able to catch up on skills they are lacking" (p. 12). Therefore, in Florida, ending the

social promotion policy seemed to have benefitted retained students.

Ladner (2012) concluded "Florida's success should inspire replication in other

states, but in the end Florida's reforms should be viewed as a floor, not a ceiling"

(Ladner, 2012, p. 14). Florida students have improved academically at a higher rate than

students across the country, but this progress may not be wholly due to ending of social

promotion. However, with initial evidence, Ladner suggested that ending social

promotion may have been an influence on improved academic achievement and public

school performance (Ladner, 2012). It would be wise to also investigate what measures

were taken to enable retained students to achieve.

Other states followed Florida on student social promotion and grade retention

policies. These states included Oklahoma, Indiana, Arizona, North Carolina, Nevada,

New York, and California. For example, Nevada's Governor, Brian Sandoval, said he

would follow Florida's education reform model by pushing for laws that ended student

social promotion (Education Week, 2011). Also, many states have tied their retention

policies to standardized test scores. For example, Texas and Louisiana target multiple grade levels in both reading and math achievement. Also, New York and Chicago have retention policies tied to standardized tests (Robolen, 2012). On the other hand, the school district of Philadelphia does not use tests as a sole means of evaluating students for retention (Barnett, 2011). These ideas should all be considered when working to assure student academic progress.

Oklahoma is one state that has adopted new reading policies that call for third graders to be retained if they do not pass the state standardized reading test. Students who were retained may qualify for one of several good cause exemptions or mid-year promotion if they improve sufficiently. The governor of Oklahoma, Governor Fallin, explained the reasoning for retention stating, "they can't learn the math, the science, and the social studies as they go through the education system" (Robolen, 2012, p. 15). On the other hand, Robolen (2012) discussed Ms. Dodd from Oklahoma's Union district reporting she expressed concern about the impact on the retention policy. "Retaining students in the third grade based on multiple choice test is more dangerous than the practice of social promotion (as cited by Robolen, 2012, p. 15)". Opponents to stopping social promotion explain that students need multiple measures for retention decisions.

In Arizona, the house and senate approved a legislative change to a 2010 retention law that took effect in 2013-2014. The measure would close a loop hole which allowed parents to overrule the test-based retention decision policy that is in the law. Senator Richard Crandall stated "what kind of teeth are in a third grade reading law if everyone

can just opt out" (Robolen, 2012, p. 15)? In this way, Arizona maintained its policy toward retention based on its state-wide test.

Iowa lawmakers debated an education package that followed Florida's grade retention policy that would retain third grade students who did not pass the state standardized test. Supporters in Iowa contended that retention was intended as a last resort (Robolen, 2012). The key goal of the policy in Iowa was to place a large focus and apply extra pressure to ensure schools intervene early with struggling readers. Robolen (2012) reported the reasoning in Iowa is that without an adequate ability to read, children would be ill equipped to learn across disciplines and may never catch up. Therefore, retention was a way to guarantee students would receive instruction they might need.

Also, under Iowa's 2012 reading laws, students' reading levels are assessed annually in grades kindergarten through three at the beginning of each school year. If the school determines a student has a reading deficiency, the school will provide intense reading instruction to that student until the reading deficiency is remedied. In regard to retention after grade three, the school district will notify the student's parent or guardian of the opportunity for third grader to enroll in an intense summer reading program. If a student does not enroll, he or she will be retained. If enrolled, upon completion of the summer program the student may be promoted to the fourth grade and the student will continue receiving the intense reading instruction until the student is deemed proficient (Balkcom, 2014). Information above indicates that Iowa only uses retention as a last resort and provides remediation to struggling students.

In November 2013, the Washington, D.C. Congress gave tentative approval to a bill intended to end social promotion in the district's public schools (Brown, 2013). This measure would repeal a rule that requires most district elementary and middle school students to be socially promoted regardless of academic achievement or performance. The bill will also allow school officials to decide whether a student is ready to be promoted to the next grade. Students who are retained would be required to attend summer school. Education Committee Chairman, David A. Catania, stated "these decisions are best made by the teacher, the principal, and the chancellor, as opposed to the existing regulations" (Brown, 2013). Catania further stated, "existing rules, which permits schools to fail students only in grades three, five, and eight, allows students to advance to the next grade simply by breathing" (Brown, 2013, p. 1). Although information reviewed that Washington, D. C. is moving away from social promotion, they appear to be installing a policy where a team would make the decision about retention, unlike Florida, Indiana, and Oklahoma that tie retention decisions to test scores (Brown, 2013).

A bill called the Nebraska School Act was presented by Senator Scott Lautenbaugh of Nebraska to the Nebraska education committee in 2014 would end the social promotion policy; however, the Nebraska State Education Association opposed the bill as it was currently written. According to Jay Sears of the Nebraska State Education Association, "not all students come to school ready to learn, and each child progresses at a different rate" (Scalora, 2014, p. 1). In the bill, school districts would be mandated to develop an accelerated reading intervention program for kindergarten through third

graders who were deficient in reading. In addition, under the bill, students would be allowed to be promoted to the fourth grade if they qualified for an exemption by providing work samples through a portfolio which would demonstrate they meet the reading standards. (Scalora, 2014). On the opposing side, there were some educators in Nebraska who disagreed with the idea of holding back a third grader only because he or she didn't pass a reading test. The assistant superintendent of the Omaha district said "such laws hurt students rather than help them because evaluation of a student's progress requires more than one test" (Demillo, 2013). Associate superintendent of Grand Island Public Schools agreed with educators and others who said holding students back could cause them psychological damage. Repeating a grade level does not ensure a child will get the instruction they need at their individual level of development, however, Senator Scott Lautenbaugh stated "the cost is greater over the long run of letting kids that are set up to fail proceed onward and fail" (Demillo, 2013). Educators and lawmakers in Nebraska disagree about social promotion and grade retention.

The state of Ohio has addressed social promotion as well. Ohio requires annual reading assessments administered to third grade students. Schools are not permitted to promote a third-grade student who does not meet the state required reading level. However, if at the start of the fourth grade the student participates in remedial services and demonstrates reading proficiency in accordance with state standards, the school must promote the student to the fourth grade. As in Iowa, retained students must be provided with remediation, which in Ohio is at least ninety minutes of daily reading instruction in addition to their regular reading curriculum (Balkcom, 2014).

As of 2004, Chicago's debate regarding social promotion had faded. In the state of Illinois there were a few districts who made standardized test scores a primary factor in retaining students (Barnett, 2011). Barnett reported that there are many large districts and charter schools that utilize several aspects before retaining students and don't pass them along for social reasons. However, schools weren't failing large numbers of students either. Social promotion has faded in Illinois, however, there are multiple factors involved in the decisions leading to retaining a student (Barnett, 2011).

In New York, Mayor Michael Bloomberg made ending student social promotion a major factor in his education platform (Barnett, 2011). New York City School District decided to hold back fifth graders under a new policy which was implemented to end social promotion (Barnett, 2011). In New York City, students are tested every year between grades three and eight and promotion is based on test scores. New York social promotion policy emphasized early intervention for students before they came to the point of being retained. A RAND Corporation study found that early intervention supports assisted students in meeting the promotion criteria in New York (Barnett, 2011). The New York City Department of Education implemented a reform initiative that included a new assessment-based promotion policy for general education students beginning in 2003-2004 school year with third grade students. By school year 2009, the policy was fully extended to Grades 3 through 8. The key feature of the retention policy was based on non-proficiency on the standardized tests. In addition, the policy provided multiple attempts to demonstrate proficiency in order to be promoted. The additional attempts included a portfolio review or a chance to attend the city's summer instructional

programs. Summer school students scoring non-proficient on a summer assessment were then eligible to be retained (Mariano & Martorell, 2013). It is unclear how much the early intervention practices added to improve test scores, but could be assumed to have helped.

There are districts who have questioned retention and social promotion for financial reasons. For example, the Texas Education Commission signaled they might suspend the state's retention policy that targeted fifth and eighth graders if sufficient state funds for interventions were not restored (Robolen, 2012). Additionally, Los Angeles had a high percentage of students who needed extra assistance, but was not able to provide it to each student. The budget constraints forced school officials to abandon the social promotion policy because the district could no longer afford summer school to improve student achievement (Barnett, 2011). The fact of low school budgets can often eliminate possible extra support for students.

Lastly, North Carolina also dropped their social promotion policy based on end-of-the-year exams for third, fifth, and eighth-graders that had been used to ensure students were mastering their grade level subjects (Associated Press, 2010). The North Carolina state board of education felt the social promotion policy did not appear to be effective. The purpose of the testing requirement was to reduce social promotion. However, the tests didn't work due to exceptions in the policy which allowed principals to promote students who had failed (Education Week, 2010).

The reviewed research addressed the many variables that make up the success or lack of success of promotion policies. Literature provides the positive and negative effects of social promotion and retention. The literature also provides information on the

different states on whether they participate in social promotion or not. For example, Oklahoma, Indiana, Arizona, North Carolina, Nevada, New York, and California have ended social promotion; Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, and Illinois have opted for ending social promotion with an alternative in place. Although the end of social promotion is on the rise, there are schools that still practice it often requiring additional remediation for less successful students.

Many studies have been presented that are related to the local problem. It seems the longitudinal studies may provide the best information about the academic effects as well as social effects of social promotion and retention. Green and Winters (2012), Lorence (2014), Jimerson and Renshaw (2012), Karp (2011), Vandecandelaere et al. (2014), Johnson (2015), and Ladner (2011) present positive pictures of retention documenting that students were able to make gains. Wu et al, (2010) presented a positive picture of retention also, however the gains the students made in his study were only short-term. Martin (2011), Venable (2015), Chohan and Qadir (2013), and Ritzema and Shaw (2012) stressed that retention resulted in students suffering social stigma. Powell (2010) felt retention was an ineffective strategy. Martin (2011) and Moser et al., (2012) felt students who were retained showed no significant gains. And finally, Dombek and Connor (2012) reported that students who had been socially promoted made good progress. The social promotion/retention issue is complex because it is not clear in any study if students lacked the ability to achieve on grade level. Schools need to provide support to help students whether struggling in retention or social promotion.

Implications

The final project will not be decided until completion of the study I have conferenced with my committee. With consideration of the data generated and review of related literature, the implications for this research study are possible ideas for how to improve achievement of socially promoted students. Data from my study may also indicate how teachers wish to consider addressing the present social promotion policy. To implement these changes a professional development workshop for teachers could be organized to include the discussion and development of plans together addressing low achievement and decisions about social promotion and retention. In addition, I could also meet with state educational officers with the goal of sharing results of my study and discussing the social promotion policy in Georgia.

Summary

Low student achievement scores of socially promoted students are a problem at the focus school. Social promotion was initially created to keep students with their peers, but in the study setting, socially promoted students are not making sufficient progress. Since the implementation of new, more demanding standards social promotion has become a serious concern at the focus school. Therefore, in this study I propose to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving students, specifically socially promoted students within the school. In Section 2, I present the qualitative design and approach for the research study. The methodology includes description of participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

In Section 2, I describe the methodology for this qualitative case study conducted to investigate the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school. In this section, I explain the qualitative approach chosen, how my choices follow from the problem and research questions, and I describe data collection and data analysis procedures.

A qualitative case study was used to investigate participants' perspectives. A case study, as opposed to other research designs, depends on what the researcher wants to know, especially if it involves current events or if the variables are embedded in the situation and impossible to identify ahead of time (Merriam, 2009). Using the case study approach for choosing a certain setting (Creswell, 2012) within qualitative research, I focused on third, fourth, and fifth grades in one elementary school to investigate how teachers view social promotion and retention and why they felt that way using Tomlinson's (2014) conceptual framework of differentiated instruction.

I chose a case study design over other qualitative options such as grounded theory, ethnographic, or narrative designs because it was best suited to the research study through its defining characteristics. A case study allowed for me to inform on a situation in order to better understand it. In addition, a qualitative case study allowed me to collect data in a natural setting and make direct observations rather than relying on data derived

from schools and government agencies such as test scores and responses to questionnaires (see Yin, 2014). A case study can be particularistic, which means the researcher focuses on a situation, event, or program. In this research, I focused on a situation of participants' perspectives on social promotion and retention as they have experienced teaching socially promoted and retained students (see Merriam, 2009). The purpose was to investigate what participants think about the topic by reporting their experiences in interviews; thus, a qualitative case study was chosen to help me answer my questions.

Other methods that did not fit the study were grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative design. Grounded theory would not have served my purposes because it is a systematic qualitative procedure used to generate a theory and explain a process, action, or an interaction about a substantive topic (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory was not chosen because the goal was not to develop a theory but to better understand the setting. An ethnographic design is a qualitative research procedure in which the researcher describes, analyzes, and interprets a culture sharing the group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time (Creswell, 2012). An ethnographic design was not considered for this study because ethnography entails extensive observations over substantial time during which time the observer develops interpretations. However, I investigated participants' perspectives without just doing observations, and the purpose of the study was not to study a cultural or social group. The purpose was to investigate teachers' perspectives on low achieving socially promoted and retained students' academic achievement and how it can be improved. A narrative

research design was not chosen because that process is used to collect and tell stories about people's lives and write narratives of individual experiences (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). A narrative design was not chosen because the study is not about the life of an individual, but about teachers reporting their perceptions from their concerns of low student achievement within the school policy of social promotion. Therefore, a qualitative case study was best suited for this research study, because I explored multiple perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and teachers' suggestions to address improving student achievement of low achieving students within the school.

Participants

The study was conducted at an elementary school located in a suburban district in southeastern Georgia. I interviewed 12 teachers who have been employed at the research study site for at least 1 school year. This was necessary to ensure that each participant was a teacher who has taught socially promoted and retained students for at least 1 school year. By interviewing 12 teachers, I collected a variety of teachers' insights, as their professional lives are affected by the impact of achievement scores. According to Merriam (2009), interviewing a small number of participants should be considered when conducting an intensive case study; this case study is based on one focus school, not different schools. In addition, data saturation can occur within the first 12 interviews and after that new phenomena are not likely to emerge (Guest et al., 2006). The criteria for participant selection was a purposeful sampling of classroom teachers in the intermediate third, fourth, and fifth grades who teach core subject areas such as

language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science and have done so for at least 1

year. Purposeful sampling is where individuals and sites are selected intentional to learn

learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The purposeful sample

was classroom teachers who collaborate on a regular basis at weekly data meetings per

the requirement of the principal about student data and whose average student

achievement scores are affected by student social promotion (School of Focus Records,

2014). In a school of 45 certified teachers, the criteria of participant selection was

intermediate grade teachers versus the primary grade teachers because the third, fourth,

and fifth grades are where students are tested for proficiency for student achievement by

the state and achievement is based on scores of these standardized tests. The information

of whether a participant met the criteria of having been at the focus school for at least 1

year was obtained from the principal. Other teachers who were not included in the

research study in the intermediate grades were the teachers who teach gifted students.

These teachers' insights were needed because their professional lives are affected by the

impact of achievement scores and, in order to address their concerns, their input is

needed. See Table 8 for the plan of scheduling 12 interviews during the first month

following Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Based on the number of years of experience at their current elementary school,

12 teachers participated in this study. The age of the teachers ranged from 25 to 51 years

of age. The grade levels that were taught by these participants ranged from third grade to

fifth grade. Six of the participants taught all the subject areas whereas the remaining

seven taught courses that were departmentalized: language arts/social studies or

math/science. All participants were asked to be part of this study based on at least 1 year of experience. The sample consisted of all female teachers due to lack of male teachers within the third, fourth, and fifth grade. There were 12 participants interviewed: three teachers have taught 1-5 years, one has taught 6-10 years, four have taught 11-15 years, and four have taught 16+ years.

Procedures for Gaining Access

Prior to the study, I held an introductory meeting about the research study at the school of focus with all teacher participants who have taught at the focus school for at least 1 year and have worked with socially promoted students. The teacher participants were invited to the introductory meeting by the means of personal communication. I spoke individually to each teacher alone then sent a follow-up reminder e-mail for the meeting. The purpose of the introductory meeting was to explain the purpose of the study, the procedures for the data collection, and participant protections included in the informed consent. After the introductory meeting, I handed out the informed consent form and an envelope with my name on it. Teachers were asked to place their informed consent in my mailbox at the school. I gained acceptance from all 12 possible teachers, but if I had not received the informed consent form after a week, I would have sent another e-mail asking them to participate and gave them an additional week to submit the form. If I did not receive acceptance from all 12, I would have to used other teachers who would have provided consent, such as former teachers who still teach at the school who have had experience teaching Grades 3 through 5 with socially promoted students.

Methods of Establishing Researcher/Participant Relationship

I took a few steps to establish a researcher/participant relationship. First, I

obtained the interest of the participants individually by presenting the situation of the low

achievement of socially promoted students in the school of focus. I then assured the

participants of how I would investigate teachers' perspectives of social promotion and

retention within the school and possible ways to improve academic achievement scores.

In addition, I discussed with the participants how important their input is in order to help

the students' progress and related test scores. Lastly, as I set up data collection, I assured

participants' comfort in a neutral classroom that was not being used, would remain

private for the duration of the interview, and neither belongs to myself or the participants

with light refreshments, safety, and relaxation throughout their participation in the study.

The Walden IRB granted approval for data collection on May 19, 2017 (approval #05-19-

17-0297395) and expires May 18, 2018. Interviews began immediately following

approval from the Walden IRB.

Protection of Participants

Many steps were taken to protect participants. I gained permission from the

superintendent and from the principal of the focus school. The names of the participants

and the school were changed for the purpose of confidentiality. There was another

meeting with myself and each teacher participant about the confidentiality of the research

study. I gave confidentiality agreements and informed consent forms to the participants. I

reminded the participants that their identities will be protected during the research

process. All participants of the study were voluntary participants and were assured that all

their responses will be kept confidential. Participants were guaranteed that no identifying

information will be included in the report of the study and interviewees will be

represented by a code without revealing names. Additionally, participants were assured

that the research records were kept secured, in a locked location and on my computer

accessible only by me with my private code.

Data Collection

The data for the research study were collected through individual interviews and

reviews of teachers' lesson plans indicating differentiation for low achieving students. I

created the interview questions to garner perspectives of teachers on social promotion in

Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think can be done to improve

achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school.

Additionally, through the use of a lesson plan observation tool protocol, I reviewed

teachers' lesson plans indicating differentiation to determine what remedial opportunities

may be provided for socially promoted and retained students not working on grade level.

Individuals volunteered to participate in 45- to 60-minute open-ended, semistructured,

one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted a minimum of 45 minutes with

a maximum of 1 hour to reach saturation. Saturation is where a researcher determines

there is no new data to provide any new information or insights for the research topic

(Creswell, 2012). One-on-one interviews are when a researcher asks questions and

records answers from only one participant in the study at a time (Kvale & Brinkmann,

2009). One-on-one interviews were the best data collection method for this study because

it allowed participants to speak without hesitation, in confidence, and share ideas with a

supportive interviewer. A standard open-ended interview format was used with each

participant who contributed unique perspectives of student social promotion and grade

retention as it may influence student achievement. I developed the interview questions

based on the problem, research questions, theoretical framework, and relevant literature.

A copy of the questions was given to each interviewee when we met. See Appendix B for

interview questions. I carried out interviews at the school site of the participants in a

neutral classroom at the time chosen by the interviewee outside of school time so

instructional time is not interrupted.

Each interview was audiotaped, and I used the interview questions as a general

outline. Prompts for elaboration were used to guarantee rich data. I transcribed the

interview responses myself and saved them in a file on my home computer. Printed

transcripts were used for data analysis. At the end of each interview, I sent an e-mail to

each participant and asked them to review it for accuracy or additional thoughts they may

still have; I also printed out each transcript and hand delivered it to each participant and

asked them to make any corrections on it and put it in an envelope and put in my

mailbox. I took notes of their feedback and sought to work for accuracy of participants'

perspectives. I used a reflective journal in which I wrote notes after each interview with

my thoughts about emerging ideas (see Lodico et al., 2010). The journal notes were used

during my analysis and development of the findings.

Table 8

Interview Schedule

Month	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
June	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade

Day 1 –	Day 1 –	Day 1 –
Teacher 1	Teacher 5	Teacher 9
Day 2 –	Day 2 –	Day 2 –
Teacher 2	Teacher 6	Teacher 10
Day 3 –	Day 3 –	Day 3 –
Teacher 3	Teacher 7	Teacher 11
Day 4 –	Day 4 –	Day 4 –
Teacher 4	Teacher 8	Teacher 12

The second data source was teachers' lesson plans. I retrieved lesson plans from the individual participants for each subject area they teach: reading, math, language arts, social studies, and science as soon as the one-on-one interviews were completed. One lesson plan was collected from each subject. A total of 4 lesson plans were collected from each participant. After the completion of the interviews, including teachers reviewing the notes and interviews transcribed, I studied the lesson plans and took notes to document the different types of activities in the lesson plans differentiated for improving achievement of socially promoted and retained students. These notes were recorded on a chart that I can later use for analysis; this method helped me compare and contrast ideas. During the review of the lesson plans I did not interact with the participants. During the lesson plans review, I documented how teachers are doing differentiated instruction.to see how the differentiation is used to contribute to advancement of socially promoted students. Information from the lesson plans provided a picture of the teachers' perspectives of achievement of socially promoted students and how they plan for differentiating instruction to help nonproficient students; the lesson plans documented how teachers plan for this differentiation.

Research Questions Matched to Interview Questions

RQ1: What are teachers' perspectives about low achievement of socially promoted students at the focus school?

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. What grades/subject are you teaching now?

3. What is your perspective on social promotion based on your experiences? Describe some experiences.

4. How do you decide when to promote students to the next grade level even though they have not demonstrated the necessary skills to be successful in the next school year?

5. Describe a situation when you feel social promotion is warranted.

6. Do you think the practice of social promotion is a positive or negative practice for the child involved? Explain your perspective.

7. How do you view students who have been socially promoted who are currently enrolled in your class? Please explain the following students' work.

8. In your opinion, what main criteria should be considered when deciding to socially promote a student?

9. In your experience, how do you think social promotion affects a child academically?

10. In your experience, have you felt socially promoted students were capable of keeping up with their peers or did they struggle?

RQ2: What are teachers' perspectives of retained students' academic achievement at the focus school?

Interview Questions

11. What is your perspective on grade retention based on your experiences? Describe some experiences.

12. How do you decide when to retain students at your school when they have not demonstrated the necessary skills to be successful in the next grade?

13. Describe a situation when you feel retention is warranted?

14. Do you think the practice of retention is a positive or negative practice for the child involved? Explain your perspective.

15. How are parents involved in the decision to retain or socially promote the student?

16. In your opinion, what main criteria should be considered when deciding to retain a student?

17. In your experience, how do you think grade retention affects a child academically?

RQ3: What methods do teachers use with socially promoted students and what do teachers think can be done to improve achievement for socially promoted and retained students?

Interview Questions

18. How do you make curricular changes for students who have been socially promoted? Further prompt: Do you plan for differentiating instruction?

19. What specific interventions are in place for socially promoted students?

20. What specific interventions are in place for retained students? Prompt: How do you differentiate instruction for these students?

21. What is your school district's policy and procedures for social promotion?

22. What is your school district's policy and procedures for student retention?

23. Have you retained students and found the extra year to be beneficial? Please explain.

24. What do you suggest needs to be done to help the socially promoted students who struggle?

Role of Researcher

As the researcher, I am employed as an elementary 1st grade school teacher at the focus school. I acknowledge that I am employed in the school in which the study is conducted and only have an interest in the teachers' perspectives on student social promotion and grade retention. Although I am a teacher at the same school where the research will be conducted, I am not in any supervisory role over the participants and have no power over the study's participants. I will have a good rapport since teachers have expressed concerns about socially promoted students' low achievement and are eager to work on solutions. As the researcher, I have a positive relationship with the staff and administration and think the teachers will be agreeable about participation as they are concerned about the problem. The researcher is only a data collection instrument through the research. I hope the participants will be forthcoming with information regarding their perspectives of student social promotion, grade retention and student achievement.

Data Analysis

There are different techniques involved in analyzing data. The method is

determined by the researcher's preference and the method that will yield the best results.

The data collected from the interviews and reviews of lesson plan documents were

organized, coded, interpreted, and synthesized into meaningful categories showing trends

and patterns discovered in this single site case study. I analyzed responses based on how

they relate to the research questions and differentiated instruction. Throughout the

analysis process I looked for specific words and phrases and organized them so I could

find themes. I then took a look at the themes and analyzed them through the research

questions which enabled me to answer them.

Analysis of Interviews

Following each interview, I transcribed the audio-recorded information.

Organization was critical due to the amount of information that was be acquired.

Computer files were labeled according to teacher and classroom; printed out transcripts

were used for analysis and were also be filed by teacher and classroom. My reflective

journal notes were stored with the hard copy files in the same manner. See Table 9 for a

tentative interview transcription plan during the first month following completion of

interviews.

Table 9

Interview Transcription and Analysis Plan

	3rd Grade Teachers	4th Grade Teachers	5th Grade Teachers
July	Day 1 –Teacher 1 –	Day 5 –Teacher 5 –	Day 9 –Teacher 9 –

	Transcribe – 4 hours	Transcribe – 4 hours	Transcribe – 4 hours
	Day 2 – Teacher 2 –	Day 6 – Teacher 6 –	Day 10 – Teacher 10
	Transcribe – 4 hours	Transcribe – 4 hours	– Transcribe – 4 hours
	Day 3 – Teacher 3 –	Day 7 – Teacher 7 –	Day 11 – Teacher 11
	Transcribe – 4 hours	Transcribe – 4 hours	– Transcribe – 4 hours
	Day 4 – Teacher 4 –	Day 8 – Teacher 8 –	Day 12 – Teacher 12
	Transcribe – 4 hours	Transcribe – 4 hours	– Transcribe – 4 hours
August	Day 1 –Teacher 1 –	Day 5 –Teacher 5 –	Day 9 –Teacher 9 –
	Analyze – 4 hours	Analyze – 4 hours	Analyze – 4 hours
	Day 2 – Teacher 2 –	Day 6 – Teacher 6 –	Day 10 – Teacher 10
	Analyze – 4 hours	Analyze – 4 hours	– Analyze – 4 hours
	Day 3 – Teacher 3 –	Day 7 – Teacher 7 –	Day 11 – Teacher 11
	Analyze – 4 hours	Analyze – 4 hours	– Analyze – 4 hours
	Day 4 – Teacher 4 –	Day 8 – Teacher 8 –	Day 12 – Teacher 12
	Analyze – 4 hours	Analyze – 4 hours	– Analyze – 4 hours

In the process of transcription, my plan was followed with minor deviations. Once transcribed and printed out, I coded the hard copy of each interview. Coding is a process that occurs when sense is made out of text data by dividing it into text or image segments, labeling segments with codes, examining the codes for overlapping and redundancy, and collapsing the codes into broad themes (Saldana, 2015). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) listed several types of coding including setting/context, situation, process, activity, event, strategy, narrative, and method codes. Choosing the type of code is dependent on the type of research that will be done and the research questions. I studied transcribed interviews a number of times to define emerging themes inductively, then I assigned codes to the themes. This made the process continuous and allowed me to categorize the common themes and trends as they were collected. By using the collected data from the interviews. I compared teacher comments and looked for consistent words or comments made by the teacher participants.

Analysis of Lesson Plans

To see how teachers used differentiated instruction, I reviewed teachers' lesson plan documents. I took notes about how teachers were differentiating instruction and then recorded information in a table by subject area (Appendix C). This visual representation enabled me to decipher how the teachers were creating lesson plans that included differentiated lessons in order for students who were socially promoted to be able to possibly catch up to their current grade level. Teachers' lesson plans were also analyzed and evaluated to better understand how the teacher participants were implementing differentiated lesson plans based on below grade level and on grade level by looking at

the simplicity and complexity of the lesson plans. I analyzed the lesson plans by completing three reviews a day over the course of four days until all had been reviewed. Therefore, I sought to better understand how the teachers developed lessons tailored to the needs of individual students.

Evidence of Quality

  Triangulation of data. Qualitative researchers usually depend on different methods for gathering and interpreting data to present a case. These practices are referred to as triangulation. Triangulation is the corroboration of evidence from different methods of data collection in descriptions and themes (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation in this study involved comparing the various responses the teachers gave during the interview process and evidence of teaching in lesson plans. By comparing teacher interviews about social promotion and retention with teachers' efforts to differentiate in lesson plans, I understood the case of teachers' perspectives of social promotion and retention and how to possibly improve achievement of socially promoted students.

  Assurance of trustworthiness. Following each transcription, I used accuracy checking to ensure interview answers were correct by e-mailing the transcription to each participant and asked for comments and confirmation or revision. Each member assured me the transcription was accurate and no changes were necessary. Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2012). The process of member checking also involves the researcher taking preliminary analysis back to the participants and asking whether the interpretation of the data is interpreted correctly. "This [member checking] is the single most important

way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say"

(Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Following my final analysis and preliminary write up of

interpretation and conclusions, I shared my ideas with the participants and asked for their

feedback once again. The participants were asked to agree or disagree that the summaries

reflect their feelings, experiences, or views. If the accuracy is affirmed, the research is

said to have credibility (Harper & Cole, 2014).

Addressing Discrepant Cases

Any discrepant data that will vary from the more common responses or my

preconceived notions and biases was presented objectively and helped to further

understand teachers' perspectives on student social promotion and grade retention.

Discrepant data were checked for resolvability (Lodico et al., 2010), which means if it

can be resolved it was placed in categories based on commonalities and included in the

findings. If it did not neatly fit into an already constructed category, it was discussed

separately in its own category as it relates to the teachers' perspectives on social

promotion and grade retention.

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Limitations

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This study was limited to third, fourth, and fifth grades and teachers whose

students did not achieve a proficient score of 800 plus on the CRCT in 2011, 2012, and

2013 and proficient or distinguished on the GMAS in 2014 and 2015 in one school in a

local school district in Georgia; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to the

population at large. It was also limited to a brief segment of time and during one school

year. Interviews were always limited by the willingness of participants to discuss the

questions. Also, evidence of differentiation was addressed in my review of lesson plans; observations may reveal more about the plans, but was not used to disrupt instruction.

Data Analysis Results

The problem that prompted this research study is inadequate academic progress of socially promoted students. In this research, I attempted to answer three research questions:

RQ 1: What are teachers' perspectives about low achievement of socially promoted students at the focus school?

RQ 2: What are teachers' perspectives of retained students' academic achievement at the focus school?

RQ 3: What methods do teachers use with socially promoted students and what do teachers think can be done to improve achievement for socially promoted and retained students?

The data for the research were generated through individual interviews and review of lesson plans. I contacted all qualified teachers and then held an introductory meeting about the research study at the school of focus with all qualified teacher participants. I personally invited the potential teacher participants, who are qualified by being a third, fourth, or fifth grade teacher and who did not teach any gifted courses. I spoke individually to each teacher alone then sent a follow-up reminder e-mail for the meeting. The purpose of the introductory meeting was to explain the purpose of the study, the procedures for the data collection, and participant protections included in the informed consent. At the conclusion of the introductory meeting, I handed out the

informed consent form and an envelope with my name on it. Teachers were asked to place their informed consent in my mailbox at the school. I gained acceptance from all 12 possible teachers.

Each interview took place at the school of focus in a secluded classroom and was audiotaped using the interview questions as proposed. Following each interview, I transcribed the audio-recorded information. Once transcribed and printed out, I coded the hard copy of each interview. I studied transcribed interviews a number of times to define emerging themes inductively, then I assigned codes to the themes. By using the collected data from the interviews. I compared teacher comments and looked for consistent words or comments made by the teacher participants. To see how teachers used differentiated instruction, I reviewed teachers' lesson plan documents and took notes that I recorded in a table by subject area.

Analysis of Interviews

In preparation for analyzing the interviews, I transcribed the interviews and printed them out. I then read the transcripts a number of times to capture emerging ideas and coded them. I then organized the coded ideas into different meaningful categories, then into themes to report. After analyzing the interview data, three main themes emerged: (a) Too far behind academically, (b) standards not met, (c) differentiated instruction in small groups. These themes helped me address the problem and answer the research questions. These themes are presented as they answer each research question. I will include quotes that support the theme. Each individual's perspective will be presented and referred to as Interviewee #1 through #12.

Research Question 1

  Theme 1: Too far behind academically. All the teachers who were interviewed shared their perspectives of social promotion and achievement of socially promoted students. Most of the teachers interviewed, voiced their opinion about students being too far behind academically when they had been socially promoted. This is a concern for teachers because Georgia requires proficiency of students. This means that students must score proficient or distinguished on the state GMAS. For example, Interviewee #2 stated, "social promotion is not benefitting the child or the teacher because they're not on grade level and already behind." Interviewee #2 also described experiences with socially promoted students. For example, Interviewee #2 had students come into their upper level class on a second-grade reading level who did not understand the upper grade terms and vocabulary because it was too difficult for them. And because the level of work was too difficult for the student, Interviewee #2 also stated, "the students reach a level of frustration and shut down. So, therefore, it becomes difficult to teach those [socially promoted] students. This occurs because they cannot read or comprehend the content."

  Interviewee #1 also gave perspectives on social promotion. Interviewee #1 felt social promotion is not as effective as we think it should be because students are passed along still lacking prerequisite knowledge required for the grade. Interviewee #1 experience with social promotion as was stated is "most students come to my class not knowing their multiplication facts which is a third grade skill. I have to go through the process of reteaching this skill as well as teach the math skills currently required". In

addition, Interviewee #1 stated, "I do not understand how the students moved from grade to grade without knowing their multiplication facts."

Interviewee #5 reported against social promotion. Interviewee #5 stated, "pushing the students on to the next grade hurts the child. They do not get caught up within the year because they are so far behind and it hurts them in the future."

Interviewee #4 also felt social promotion is a problem. Interviewee #4 stated, "social promotion is a practice that we have been practicing and it needs to be stopped." To explain her feelings, interviewee #4 stated that students should only be promoted if they have met the state standards and "this appears not to be the case." Interviewee #4 had experienced first-hand many years where teachers taught students who did not meet the state standards nor did they pass the state standardized test but yet the students were socially promoted. "My experience with social promotion was a student who I taught in the third grade and I ended up with the same student in the fifth grade when I was moved. The same child had been socially promoted, was struggling, and could not keep up with their fifth grade peers because they were too far behind."

Interviewee #8 felt that social promotion does not work well. Interviewee #8 stated:

> There are too many students who are not prepared to go on to the next grade level if they have not mastered a lot of the concepts and skills and standards that are taught at the present grade level. She felt some of the socially promoted students are two to three grade levels behind but they move on to the next grade with no skill set for that grade.

She expanded on her experience:

You have a student in fourth grade who is three grade levels behind in math. So while that child might be working on subtraction, I might be teaching dividing fractions which might be the current standard for fourth grade. However, the struggling child still is struggling to subtract and struggling to add with regrouping. Forget division and multiplication because they are still having struggles and still find it challenging to line up numbers in the ones place and the tens place. So here we are fast forward three years later, two years later, the child is now in fourth grade and has not mastered subtraction, has not mastered addition among other math standards including telling time, counting money and here we have the child sitting in a classroom where I am teaching you to divide fractions and it is going over that child's head.

Interviewee #8 recognized children's frustration and suggested the child began to act out and a behavior problem was created. Interviewee #8 also stated, "it is frustrating for me, the teacher, teaching students who are so far behind because there is no way that I can go back and do a spiral review of subtraction, addition, multiplication because I now have to teach the current standards".

Subtheme 1: Struggling students. Students who struggle due to being socially promoted has become a common theme for the teachers who were interviewed. They expressed belief that students who have not mastered the standards are going to struggle from year to year. For example, Interviewee #4 stated, "if you [student] have not met the requirements from third grade and you're sitting in a fourth-grade class you are going to

struggle. You are going to struggle if you are in a fifth-grade class and you are performing on the level of third grade student." Interviewee #3 felt socially promoted students are affected negatively because they are behind in their coursework due to struggling. Interviewee #3 stated, "they don't have the skills necessary for the current grade level so moving them on to the next grade is only going to make it worse for the students. They are going to struggle". Interviewee #1 felt that social promotion affects a child negatively and causes them to struggle. Interviewee #1 stated, "if the students do not have the prerequisite knowledge to maintain throughout the grade level and if they are missing basic skills they are basically a "sitting duck" and will fall further behind." Interviewee #7 felt socially promoted students will struggle "terribly". Interviewee #7 stated, "because they end up struggling, they in turn become behavior problems and they end up being suspended or out of class so that puts them even further behind because they are not in class to obtain the instructional time." Lastly, Interviewee #8's perspective on socially promoted students struggling is as stated, "It does not help at all to send a student who cannot add, cannot subtract from first grade to second grade to third grade and on to the next grade. And while they are struggling they become behavior problems and causes disruptions within the class." Overall of the 12 participants interviewed many voiced their perspectives that students who are socially promoted tend to struggle.

Subtheme 2: Concerns about age. This subtheme was developed due to an interview question asking participants to discuss the positives and negatives of social promotion. The negative views of social promotion are explained previously with concerns over academic struggles to learn in the higher grade. This information explains

teachers' positive ideas about social promotion. Although social promotion is not popular as viewed by the teachers interviewed, there are however reasons they deemed it necessary to socially promote a student. The warranted reason of social promotion was age. In the history of social promotion, as the community population grew, one classroom became inefficient and parents were concerned about the influence the older students would have on younger students (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Participants stated that when students reached upper grades social promotion may be warranted.

Interviewee #8 was concerned that when children start getting bigger in terms of physically bigger they should be socially promoted. Interviewee #8 stated, "if you already have a student who is a big boy and you keep him back in fourth grade again, he may end up seated with a rising fourth grader who is possibly small. He is already one year physically more mature and you know we do not know what that means for him sexually." Interviewer #8 also stated,

> So it is just I am always a little bit nervous to have bigger kids around younger
> kids because we do not know how much more physically and sexually mature
> they are. Yes you may be on the same level as a first grader, but I cannot put a
> fourth grader in a first grade class because you might have a fourth grader who
> doesn't mind touching kids because they touch each other and then you might
> have a first grader who doesn't know that it is inappropriate and will not say
> anything.

Interviewee #7 described warranting social promotion as follows: "I remember when I first went to junior high and there were some girls that were like 13 and 14 and I

was 11. These girls were developed and they talked about things I didn't know about and should not be knowing about". Interviewee #7 feels if there is a large disparity in age and size students should be socially promoted to keep them away from the innocence of the younger children. Interviewee #3 also feel there are times when students should be socially promoted due to age. Interviewee #3 stated, "students should be socially promoted when they are older, much more mature, taller, and heavier than the average student in the class." Interviewee #10 stated, "no 11 or 12-year-old should be in the same class as a third grader and if that is the situation, the older student needs to be socially promoted." Overall, most of the interviewees perceived that age (if a student was way too old for the current grade they are in) is an appropriate reason to socially promote students, especially if younger students are being influenced negatively. However, the students who are too old for their current grade will be treated like other socially promoted students and will have to work with them vigorously to get them caught up to their grade level.

Interviewees' responses to research question one asking for their thoughts about low achievement of socially promoted students were that these students ended up too far behind and struggled academically. Teachers felt concerned because they could not teach grade level material to help the students. However, they presented a more positive attitude towards social promotion if students were in a grade where they may be much older than other students.

Research Question 2

  Theme 2: Standards not met. Teachers at the focus school voiced their perspectives about grade retention which mainly focused on students not meeting the standards because they are expected to be on grade level. For example, Interviewee #2 stated, "grade retention is a positive because students should not be passed on to the next grade if they are not performing on the same level as their peers and not met the state standards." Interviewee #1 felt retention is necessary if the student does not possess the skills necessary for the current grade level. Interviewee #3 stated,

    I have only retained one student in my 18 years of teaching and this was because the student was constantly moving. The student had been to at least 10 schools in one academic school year. So when I received the student and found the student was too far behind academically, I couldn't justify sending the student on to the next grade without mastering the standard, so I retained the student.

  Many interviewees discussed the need to uphold the state expectation of passing required tests for each grade level in order to pass on to the next grade. Interviewee #5's perspective on retention was that the state has laws on the books about students needing to pass the current state tests in order to be promoted and the school districts should adhere to the law. Interviewee #5 stated, "I have seen students who did not pass the state test and was socially promoted to the next grade. I'd feel due to this there will be a gap in their learning because the student is not academically ready and has not mastered the state standards." Interviewee #5 claimed it is best to retain the student as early as possible because otherwise their future will be messed up and they would likely drop out and

would not be able to function in society. Interviewee #7 agreed with retaining students. She feels if students are not ready academically or socially they should be retained. She stated her experience, "in the current school year I have seen students work hard and put in work to be officially promoted to the next grade. Then there are those students who do no work at all and put in no effort but yet they are socially promoted." Interviewee #7 also proclaimed, "that is not fair and if the student did not earn the test scores to be promoted to the next grade they should be retained." Interviewee #12 felt retention is important because it is important that students master the state standards and catch up to their current grade level instead of falling further and further behind. However, her experience and issue with retention at the focus school is as follows, "when I recommended a student for retention with a surplus of data, at the end of the day the parent had the final say in regard to retention. The child was promoted anyway. I feel the parent should not have the final say. The state retention laws needs to be followed by the school district."

Interviewee #4 is for retention but feels it should be practiced in the early grades only. Their perspective is the teacher has a better chance of working with the student to help them meet the academic state standards when they are only one grade level behind instead of four when they get to the fifth grade. Their experience with retention is:

When I taught second grade, I met with a parent about retention. I had to encourage the parent to put their child back in first grade because they had not mastered the first-grade content. The parent complied and had their child placed back into first grade. At the end of the school year, the parent came back to me

and was very grateful that she encouraged the child to be placed back into first

grade because it was very beneficial to her child and he was now prepared for the

second grade instead of lagging behind his peers.

Lastly, in regard to retention interviewee #8 shared their perspective and experiences of

retention. They felt retention was the best decision a parent can make for their child if

they're not meeting the state standards. She stated,

> In my twelve years of teaching I have recommended at least a dozen students for
>
> retention but have actually only retained at least two students when I taught
>
> kindergarten. The two students who I recommended for retention repeated the
>
> grade again within my classroom. One of the students came to me in kindergarten
>
> in the middle of the school year and was very low. I convinced his mother to let
>
> him stay another school year with me in kindergarten. The mother cried and was
>
> upset about but her mother convinced her it was a good idea. The student stayed
>
> with me another year and got caught up on the kindergarten level. Then when he
>
> went on to first grade I decided to track his progress with his first-grade teacher.
>
> He was on grade level the entire school year. I also tracked his progress in second
>
> grade and he continues to remain on grade level.

Very few students are retained as most are socially promoted. Interviewee #8 also

viewed retention to be very helpful, especially in the lower grades. Interviewee #8 added,

that, as a parent:

> Would you want your child to be socially promoted and sit at the bottom of the
>
> class in the next grade or would you want your child retained and sit at the top of

the class the following year? I'd rather have my child be at the top, rather than the bottom.

Interviewees' response to research question two can be summarized as they feel students should be retained when they have not mastered the state standards. Interviewees feel retention will allow teachers to assist students in achieving at their grade level proficiency. They feel if students don't master state standards, they should be retained because otherwise it will hinder them in later grades because they will fall further and further behind.

Research Question 3

Theme 3: Differentiated instruction in small groups. Differentiated instruction is the practice of modifying and adapting, materials, content, student projects and products, and assessment to meet the learning needs of students. In a differentiated classroom teachers recognize that all students are different and require varied teaching methods to be successful in school (DeJesus, 2012). One of the main curricular changes the teachers of the focus school discussed was differentiating instruction with fidelity to meet the needs of all learners. Most teachers discussed how they implemented differentiation within their classroom. Interviewee #4 discussed their methods of differentiating instruction. "I differentiate my instruction by having students work in small groups. However, due to time constraints of lessons I'm not able to implement it daily. And because of this it tends to hinder the students learning." Interviewee #8 stated how differentiated instruction is implemented in their class.

Differentiation is definitely needed in an attempt to improve student achievement of low students. I have lesson plans that include lessons for differentiation, but I don't get to implement them daily like I would like due to other curriculum mandates mandated by the county. There are so much other curriculum we are responsible for and there is not enough time in the day to implement my small group differentiated instruction plans.

Interviewee #9 stated,

At the beginning of the year I start with small group differentiated instruction, but then the county kept implementing other curriculum mandates that are non-negotiables. So as time goes by there is less and less time to complete my differentiated instruction in small groups. This ends up hurting the lower students in the long run because you do not get to work with them to reteach skills they are still lacking and it reflects in failure on the state test.

Interviewee #1 gave their experience with differentiated instruction. Interviewee #1 stated,

The lower level students need their instruction differentiated so they are capable to grasp it. Although differentiated instruction is required I'm not capable of implementing it the way it needs to. This is because the lower level students keep getting pulled out by the Early Intervention Program and by the time they return it's time for me to move on to another subject. The administration is going to need to come up with a set schedule where we're able to implement our differentiated instruction small groups so the lower level students can succeed.

Interviewer #12 sums up their experience.

When I first started teaching here I would have my small groups using

differentiated instruction and my scores did well at that time. Now they want us to

continue to implement it but with everything else they tell us we must do there is

no time to implement it effectively like I did years ago. Now my scores are

suffering from it. They need to figure something out, otherwise the low level

students are going to continue to lose by not improving academically.

Interviewee #11 gives their experience about small group instruction.

The expectation is to have small group instruction done daily. Because I only

teach math and science, I only get to get it done in math only. There is no time to

get it done in my science block because the time is limited. Through my teacher

led math groups I see that students are slowly but surely improving, but I need

some type of assistance with science small groups to improve the students'

reading.

Lastly, interviewee #10 described experience with small group instruction.

I get to small groups when I get to them because there is hardly any time to fit it

in. So in my case students are not progressing because small groups are not

occurring as they should. I'm going to need for something to be done so that small

groups can occur as they should so the students can progress.

Overall, the interviewees shared that differentiated instruction and small groups

will aid in student achievement for low level students. However, they are having

difficulties implementing it with fidelity due to lack of time.

Interviewees' responses to research question three can be summarized as having difficulties with implementing small groups. Some interviewees engage in small groups when it fits their schedule. Some interviewees don't get to do it at all due to other curriculum restraints. However, they all feel if small groups are implemented the students would improve academically.

Analysis of Lesson Plans

In addition to interviews, I reviewed the lesson plans of the teachers who participated in the project study. The purpose of studying the lesson plans was to see how teachers were differentiating instruction and decipher how they may be creating lesson plans that include differentiated lessons in order for students who are socially promoted to be able to possibly catch up to their current grade level. As I studied the lesson plans of all the grade levels, I realized there were no differentiated lesson plans for social studies and science subject areas. In the subject of reading, the differentiated lesson plans were the same across all grade levels. The reason behind this is because the differentiated lesson plans came directly from the basal reading series. The differentiated lesson plans for reading were very detailed and included a large amount of differentiated activities on the different levels of the students. These levels included: approaching level – students who are below grade level, on-level, and beyond level – students who are above grade level. The activities included for the reading differentiated lesson plans included menus in which students selected different activities in any order until all the activities were completed. The activities were activities which focused on the skill for the week in the basal reading series. The differentiated activities included the other language arts such as

reading in leveled readers, small short story books with a low, medium, and high level, with comprehension activities to follow, grammar – practice of the grammar skill for the week, writing – students are given topics to write on with clear specific directions, phonics and spelling – practice activities for the week. For the approaching level, activities are prepared for low achieving students who were socially promoted or retained. The rigor of the activities for this group appears to be at a level where the students in this category are capable of working on them on their own with minimal assistance from the teacher.

Math lesson plans were different from the reading lesson plans. For the third grade differentiated lesson plans, students were given teacher-made menus of activities for students to complete. These activities included task cards of skills students have already learned such as multiplication and time, practice of multiplication facts, and practice worksheets based on their academic level. There are worksheets for students who are underachieving, on level, and students who are above level. The level of rigor of the differentiated activities appears to be appropriate for the students who are socially promoted or retained. The differentiated lesson plans for the fourth-grade math teachers indicate where students rotate to different centers. The differentiated activities are those similar to the third grade with the addition of the technology center which focuses on a program called successmaker for students who are below grade level. Again, the level of rigor for the differentiated activities for students who are below grade level appears appropriate. Lastly, the differentiated lesson plans for the fifth-grade teachers were basic. For example, the fifth-grade math teachers mainly used worksheets of different math

skills such as: multiplication facts and adding and subtracting decimals for their differentiated instruction. When this was done, the students who were below grade level got to work with the teacher the entire time during small-group instruction. Sometimes the same worksheet was listed for the entire week.

In summary, reading and math were the two main subjects in which teachers differentiated instruction at each grade level. There were no differentiated lesson plans for social studies or science for each grade level. Every grade level had detailed differentiated lesson plans for reading. However, only third and fourth grade had meaningful differentiated lesson plans, while fifth grade did not.

The analysis of the lesson plans indicates teachers plan for socially promoted and retained students through differentiated instruction activities. However, this is only done in the subject areas of language arts and mathematics. There are no differentiated lesson plans for social studies and science. Teachers indicated the reason for this is they don't have a lot of time to teach those subject areas much less provide differentiated instruction activities. In addition, some teachers indicated that although their lesson plans indicated differentiated instruction they sometimes do not have time to carry them out or they don't know how to.

Evidence of Quality

One component of this research study that was vital to me was the assurance of credibility to the study, the data, and the findings. I wanted to ensure the voice of my participants were heard through their words. Although there are different ways to give credibility to the study, in my case I used triangulation and member checking. The two

types of data that I used were interviews and lesson plan observations. In order to maintain thoroughness, I looked for repetition and themes in both the interviews and lesson plan observations while I analyzed any disagreeing or dissenting data. Member checking was completed after each piece of datum was collected. After each interview, the participants were able to look at the responses I wrote down to ensure that they were identical to what they meant and said. All of the participants were in full agreement with what they said and what I wrote down.

Discussion and Interpretation

This research focused on a qualitative case study to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving students, specifically socially promoted students within the school. IRB approval was obtained after the research design and research questions were discussed and outlined and the role of the researcher, criteria for participant selection, and ethical treatment of participants were summarized.

When asked about their perspectives on social promotion, most of the teachers interviewed, voiced a negative perspective of social promotion. Most of the reasons stated for their adverse opinions are when students are socially promoted without acquiring the skills of the current grade they tend to fall further and further behind. And because the students continue to fall further and further behind, student achievement continues to decline and students struggle because proficiency is required of students. It makes it difficult for the teachers to teach new material as well as review old material for the students who are not at grade level because teachers no longer meet students where

they are able to function successfully. Instead teachers are mainly required to teach at grade level in order to reach proficiency levels on tests for students who are on grade level. Overall, the teachers felt social promotion should be stopped. Just as it is seen in this study, there are negative views on social promotion in literature which causes challenges for teachers and students within the school. Mawhinney, Irby, and Roberts (2016) explored the educational life histories of two adult African-American women who graduated from United States high schools and had been socially promoted. Although these two ladies went through the school system neither received the basic education and learning supports that would prepare them to be successful in their adult life.

According to Mawhinney et al. (2016) one of the participants had trouble learning in kindergarten. Due to the situation she was retained. However, as the years passed by, she still had difficulties with learning but was passed along. She never received help from parents because her father was absent and mom was constantly working. Because of the student's learning deficits, she started to act out and cause trouble in school. The student felt she should have been tested into special education. However, when she did go through the evaluation process for special education her need to be classified was not identified. It was not until high school a counselor recognized the student's struggles, advocated for her, and got her into the special education program. Finally she was advancing in classes and graduated high school. However, through all the students school life, she could not understand how she was being passed along when she was only making F's in school. In her case, the student felt that social promotion was not beneficial

and all it did was allow her to fall behind her peers year after year (Mawhinney, Irby, &

Roberts, 2016).

Other opponents of student social promotion contend student social promotion

lowers expectations and students lose the incentive to work if they know they will be

passed along to the next grade anyway (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Carifo and Carey (2010)

reported, teachers spent more time giving attention to students who are underprepared for

work at the current grade level than addressing grade level goals. The Carifio and Carey

perspective is different from the participants in my study who said they were required to

teach to grade level expectations. The practice of having to include below-grade level

instruction interferes with a teacher's ability to focus on the other students who are

prepared to learn at the current grade level (Lynch, 2014). Lastly, opponents of social

promotion also feel students should wait until mastery of the curriculum is attained in

order to better prepare themselves for more advanced work at higher grades, otherwise

they may fall even further behind their classmates (King, Orazen, & Paterno, 2015).

According to the interviewees and literature, students should not be promoted until they

are academically prepared or they fall further and further behind.

When asked about their perspectives on grade retention, eight interviewees gave a

positive perspective. These perspectives included that if students have not met the state

standards, they are not academically prepared to be promoted to the next grade. The

interviewees felt that if students are to be retained it is best to be done in the early grades

like kindergarten and first grade because when they get to the upper grades it has no

effect by that time. They felt that when a student is retained at least in the first grade there

is only one grade behind them to catch up on versus being retained in fourth grade where there are three grade levels behind that they will need to catch up on. Also, the interviewees felt that since there are laws on the books about retention, they should be upheld for the students who are not meeting state standards, but currently they are not. The interviewees also shared their challenges in retaining a student. For example, the interviewees shared that when they recommend students for retention with a surplus of data to indicate why a student should be retained, the students are still promoted rather than retained. They indicated this stems from the refusal from the parents and therefore teachers felt parents should not be involved in the retention process. Just as seen in this study, there are positive views of retention in the literature also. Winters and Greene (2012) found Florida school administrators reported that students who lacked basic skills and were socially promoted appeared to fall further behind over time as they were continually socially promoted. The authors also concluded that students who were retained made significant academic gains from the first year in a grade to the second year in the same grade when retained. In addition, Lorence (2014) studied 38,000 third grade students in Texas and found that year after year the repeating third graders surpassed the students who were socially promoted to the next grade. This study suggests that participants felt retention may help low achievers better than social promotion. Smith and Ronan-Herzog (2014) provided an excerpt of the experiences of high school seniors who had been held back a grade in elementary school and who planned to participate in post-secondary education. Most of the students feared they would lose their friends at the time

they were retained. However, the students all displayed resiliency, overcame their challenges, and were able to find success in school.

When asked about methods to improve student achievement at the focus school, most of the interviewees referred to use of differentiated instruction through small groups. Although differentiated instruction is a requirement for the interviewees, currently, they stated that due to other curriculum mandates from the county they do not have time to implement it with fidelity. Because the interviewees are not capable of implementation with fidelity they felt that it hurts the lower level students' chances of improving academically. In addition, students are also being pulled out their classroom for other interventions which also affects their differentiated instruction time. Also, due to time constraints, differentiated instruction is slated to only occur in English language arts and math courses. In addition to differentiated instruction in small groups, lesson plans were examined for differentiation. When inspected it was found there were no differentiated instruction lesson plans for social studies or science. For the subject of language arts, the differentiated lesson plans were modeled the same across third, fourth, and fifth grade because they are already embedded in the reading basal program. The different differentiated activities included: menu choice boards, leveled readers, and varied grammar and writing activities. On the other hand, math differentiated instruction lesson plans were different. Only third and fourth grade varied differentiated lesson plans. The differentiated lesson plans activities in math included practice of multiplication facts, word problem task cards, worksheets with various skills, and incorporation of technology through the use of a math program called successmaker. Fifth grade's differentiated

lesson plans only included worksheets in which the same one was used the entire week. By using differentiated instruction, according to DeJesus (2012), teachers provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student's road map for learning is like anyone else's. There are many models available to help educators assess their students' preferred style of learning. In addition to teachers being familiar with various learning styles and the students corresponding strengths and weaknesses, educating students on their own particular learning style can help equip them with the tools to make the best of their unique set of skills, which will increase their ability to study in the most effective manner (DeJesus, 2012). In the study the interviewees incorporated differentiated instruction to meet the needs of lower level learners in reading and math only, however, it appears ineffective due to continuous low student achievement.

Summary

In Section 2, I presented an explanation of the qualitative case study methodology proposed using interviews and reviewing lesson plans to record methods used for differentiation to meet needs of retained or socially promoted students. The explanation includes the research study setting, sample selection, and data analysis plan. In addition there was the data analysis findings which included interviewees negative responses to social promotion, positive responses to retention, and differentiated instruction is a method to be used to improve student achievement for socially promoted and retained students. A full explanation of the research study project will be discussed in Section 3.

Addressing Discrepant Cases

Although the data were collected from various teacher participants and the responses and observation were varied, there were no discrepant cases. Discrepant cases occur when the researcher encounters viewpoints from respondents that differ from the literature or researchers find unexpected or contradictory data (Glesne, 2011). This particular study had 12 participants from the same location. Discrepant case may have occurred if there were more participants from other schools and possibly other districts.

Project Deliverable

The project deliverable will be a professional development project. This professional development project will focus on implementing the application of reading strategies in social studies through differentiated instruction using cooperative learning because it was discovered through my findings that teachers were not differentiating instruction in social studies. The cooperative learning will assist teachers in providing differentiated instruction in a subject area that does not receive much attention in the area. This in turn will aid in improving student achievement particularly those who have been socially promoted because they can be included in group work with more advanced students as models.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3, I describe the project as well as the goals and rationale. I also include a review of the literature and a description of the directions of the project as well as a description of how the project will be implemented with potential resources and existing supports as well as potential barriers. Also provided is a proposal for implementation and a timetable along with the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Finally, this section includes a description of the evaluation of the project and the conclusion of the local and far-reaching implications of social change.

Purpose

The purpose of the project research study was to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion in Grades 3 through 5 and investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially promoted students within the school. The project of a professional development of an application of reading strategies in social studies through differentiated instruction using cooperative learning will address the problem and help teachers better meet the needs of less successful students.

Description and Goals

The study's problem and research findings were the driving force behind this project. A professional development workshop that focuses on the application of reading strategies in social studies through differentiated instruction using cooperative learning was created as the project for this qualitative case study because professional research,

along with the data collected during this study, supported a need for a differentiated instruction training program because interviewees reported that they did not have time to implement differentiated instruction in social studies or they did not know how to do so successfully. The professional development will take place at the beginning of the school year following completion of this study.

The content of the differentiated instruction professional development was created based on the data revealed during the participants' interviews of the areas they felt their instruction may need to be improved. The professional development will provide resources to teach social studies that will aid in applying differentiated instruction and effective reading strategies; the goal is to help socially promoted student, especially if they need help with reading.

Rationale

This project was based on the problem, research, and data that were collected and analyzed. The development of the project came directly from the data analysis. The data analysis was the best choice because teachers stated within the interviews that small groups with differentiated instruction would help students improve their achievement. However, they reported that they either do not have time to implement differentiation properly or they do not know how to. In addition, the review of lesson plans showed that no lessons for differentiation in social studies were included. Although there was differentiation in reading and math plans, they were provided in the reading the math and reading instructional materials. Therefore, most retained and socially promoted students have trouble with reading and content gets more difficult, and social studies and science

become a challenge. To address the problem of low achievement, I will develop a

professional development to help teachers become better at using differentiated

instruction and use strategies to improve reading.

<div align="center">**Review of the Literature**</div>

This review of literature is the introduction to the professional development

project for social promotion and retention to address differentiated instruction in social

studies as a way to assist below grade level student progress. The information used in the

literature review was obtained from various databases such as Thoreau database and

Education Research Complete in the Walden library. I also searched the latest 5 years in

the following academic journals: *American Educational Research Journal, American*

Journal of Education, Educational Administration Quarterly, Educational Evaluation

and Policy Analysis, Educational Researcher, Educational Research Technology and

Development, Harvard Educational Review, Journal of Educational Psychology, Journal

of School Leadership, Journal of Teacher Education, Learning and Instruction, and

Review of Educational Research. The keywords used to obtain information for the

literature review were *social promotion, retention, differentiated instruction, cooperative*

learning, reading strategies, professional development, and *social studies strategies*. The

literature reviewed here is new and does not appear in the Section 1 literature review.

Social Promotion and Retention

Due to a decrease in SAT scores and a perceived softening of grading and

educational standards, there has been a growing concern that public schools were not

making the grade. Because of these concerns a publication called *A Nation at Risk* was

published by the Reagan administration included a call for additional testing that was designed to curb social promotion and increase student achievement (Huddleston, 2014). To get involved in improving student achievement and curb social promotion, large cities like New York City and Chicago and states like Florida and Georgia adopted the test-based features. However, by the 1990s the test based policies were cancelled due to huge costs and little gains. By the late 1990s and 2000s test-based policies began increasing again. President Clinton urged governors to test students for proficiency to be promoted to the next grade. His reasoning for this legislation as he spoke to governors were "look dead in the eye of some child who has been held back and say, 'We'll be hurting you worse if we tell you you've been learning something when you're not'" (Huddleston, 2014, p. 5). Since then about 15 states adopted test-based retention policies. These states included Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, North Carolina, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee and cities like Chicago and New York City (Huddleston, 2014).

Critics of mandatory retention have argued that retention offers little academic benefit. They feel it will likely increases chances that students may eventually drop out Compared to peers who have progressed normally through early grades, students who repeat a grade during elementary tend to have notably worse outcomes (Jacob, 2017).

Alternatives to Social Promotion and Retention

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) encourages the use of interventions that are effective and evidence-based and promotes the educational attainment of America's children. The NASP discourages schools from having to choose between social promotion and retention, and as an alternative, promote systems used to

identify early academic difficulties and ensure individualized evidence-based remediation plans that contain recurring progress monitoring for students who are below their current grade level (Crepeau-Hobson, Nickerson, & Cook, 2016). The reasoning is that if a student is retained, something more must be offered other than a repeat of the previous year's instruction

The NASP encourages school psychologists collaborate with teachers within the school by assuming a leadership role and implementing models of service delivery that ensure: a) problem-solving models that are multitiered and will provide early and intensive evidence-based intervention and instruction to meet the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of all the students; b) unbiased opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to learn; c) universal screening for academic, social-emotional difficulties, and behavioral difficulties; and d) frequent evaluations of interventions and progress monitoring. In addition, the NASP encourages school's maximizing student opportunities to learn through both in and outside of school through effective teacher professional development and extended day/year programs (Crepeau-Hobson et al., 2016).

Effective Professional Development

Professional development is a variety of educational experiences related to an individual's work and is designed to improve practice and outcomes. Professional development may be voluntary or mandatory, individual or collaborative, and formal or informal (Patton, Parker, & Tannenhill, 2015). However, in order for a professional development to be considered effective there are features and strategies that must be

ascertained. Sun, Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, & Youngs (2013) addressed the strategies as follows: First, professional development should not be a 1-day presentation; rather, professional development should be sustained over time. Next, professional development should be related to a teacher's current practice in education. This includes subject specific contents and skills and being linked to standards, curriculum, and assessments employed in teachers' schools and districts. Lastly, the strategies designed for teachers to use should matter. These strategies should include activities that involve active learning such as small group discussion and analyzing students' work together, which shows more effects on instructional practice than didactic lectures (Sun et al., 2013). Therefore, in order for professional development to be effective, there is criteria for strategies. Sun et al.'s suggestions will guide this professional development project to provide effective strategies to improve classroom instruction.

In addition to strategies, there are several embedded models of professional development that have been shown to enhance teaching practices: action research/ inquiry, networking, coaching strategies, and self-monitoring/self-reflection that also makes it effective. The models are:

- professional development is based on teachers' needs and interests—to be effective, professional development should focus on transforming participant-identified needs into new knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs

- in professional development, learning is a social process—professional development should build strong working relationships among teachers

- professional development includes collaborative opportunities within learning communities of educators—engagement in a professional community that extends beyond classrooms and school buildings has been identified as a powerful form of teacher learning

- in professional development teachers are treated as active learners—opportunities for teachers to engage in active learning are related to the effectiveness of professional development

- professional development enhances teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge—well-designed, effective professional development helps teachers master content, hone teaching skills, evaluate their own and their students' performance, and address changes needed in teaching and learning in their schools

- professional development is facilitated with care—successful facilitators acknowledge how teachers actively construct new meaning based on prior knowledge and experiences, recognize the influences of others in a nonjudgmental and social environment, and emphasize the relevance of formal knowledge in teacher growth and development

- professional development focuses on improving learning outcomes for students—impactful and sustained professional learning for teachers is related to student-achievement gains (Patton et al., 2015).

Differentiated Instruction for Teachers

Developing teachers into confident and effective leaders for differentiated classrooms is the ultimate goal (Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). A school district in Oakwood City School District has made differentiation their primary academic goal. They have developed a differentiated process to help all teachers and administrators understand the changes so they can move toward them together in differentiating instruction within the classroom. But for this to happen, an evaluation process was created in which teachers were evaluated on the implementation of differentiation. Experiencing an evaluation process that is differentiated to meet the teachers' needs would allow teachers to craft goals that are meaningful to them, therefore making differentiation itself more meaningful (Hewitt & Weckstein, 2012). This allows the teachers to embrace differentiation and implement it in their classroom. Efficacy is also important for embracing differentiated instruction. Teachers spending a great amount of professional development hours on differentiated instruction has been positively associated with both teacher efficacy and willingness to differentiate instruction (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014). Therefore, teacher efficacy is an important dimension in implementing the process of differentiated instruction.

Differentiated Instruction

Often higher-achieving students are bored and below-level students become increasingly frustrated. Teachers usually try to teach at a mid-level, often not even having half a class that achieves mastery. As students move through the grades, achievement gaps of class, racial, and ethnic differences get wider (Marshall, 2016). Sometimes

students tend to comprehend little and lose focus when their teachers fail to use instructional strategies that match their learning styles. Differentiated instruction can eliminate this disengagement (Morgan, 2014). Students in today's classrooms vary in background, cultures, language proficiency, educational skills, and interest. In order to best meet students' diverse needs, teachers must differentiate their instruction.

Differentiated instruction is not a new topic; however, it has become increasingly important in large schools that are not achieving at the highest levels of literacy (Watts-Taffe et al., 2013). Addressing the learning needs of students is not a trivial task. Each child has the right to learn, and each student can learn with responsive, inquisitive, constructive, inventive, and reflective instructors who pay close attention to the individual child's needs and interests (Aldaej, 2015). It is important that the support of students' needs are accounted for as they continually work toward their potential The philosophy of differentiated instruction provides a framework for addressing the diversity of students' needs (Trinter, Brighton, & Moon, 2015). Tomlinson (2014) provided a framework to assist teachers in differentiating instruction in the classroom. Differentiated instruction consists of respectful tasks, flexible grouping, and ongoing assessments through content, process, and product. Teachers are to differentiate according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Teachers can use a wide range of instructional and management strategies for differentiation, which includes tiered lessons, centers, and products; learning contracts; interest centers and groups; anchor activities; and literature circles. One of the principles of differentiated instruction is to ensure that students have meaningful respectful tasks that peak their interests andfocus on important

understandings or principles that require students to think and engage in their curiosity (Wu, 2013).

Differentiated instruction includes three areas: content, process, and product. Content is what students learn, process is how students learn, and the product is the result of student learning. The content of differentiated instruction includes curriculum topics, concepts, or themes that are differentiated by preassessing student skills and understandings then matching learners with appropriate activities. Content also provides students with choices to add depth to learning. Process in differentiated instruction reflects students learning styles and preferences as well as varying the learning process depending upon how students learn. Lastly, product in differentiated instruction reflects student understanding and differentiates by providing challenge, variety, and choice ("On Target," 2006). Content, process, and product are strategies of differentiated instruction to improve student achievement.

In addition to differentiating instruction, there are other ways to differentiate. Differentiation may also be through study guides. Study guides are popular, and students frequently request them as instructional support. Therefore, to accommodate different students' needs study guides can be differentiated. With the increase of the number of learners with diverse needs in general education classes, teachers need to consider different ways to differentiate study guides by making adjustments that maintain the integrity of student outcomes while offering choices and respecting each learner's learning preferences, skill level, and interests. In addition, study guides can be differentiated by adjusting questions and content which will allow students to

demonstrate knowledge in different ways and allowing students to use classroom

materials and space in various ways (Conderman & Hedin, 2017).

Differentiated Instruction Strategies

Differentiated instruction is an approach to instruction that incorporates a variety

of strategies that are designed to meet the needs of individual student needs. When

differentiated instruction occurs there are four different focuses. The focus can be on the

process by which students learn, the products or demonstration of student learning, the

environment in which students learn, and the content students learn (Watts-Taffe et al.,

2013).

DeJesus (2012) recommended three different instructional strategies for

differentiated instruction. The recommended strategies are use of cooperative learning,

project based learning, and multiple intelligences ideas. Cooperative learning is where

students work in small groups so they can maximize their own and their peers' learning

(VanTassel-Baska, 2016). In cooperative learning students gather together in small

groups after receiving whole group instruction from the teacher. Students then work

together on the assignment until all the students within the group understand and

complete it. Project based learning is where students explore challenging real world

problems (VanTassel-Baska, 2016). This type of activity allows students to engage in

their learning by inspiring them to obtain a deeper knowledge of the subjects they're

trying to study. Lastly, multiple intelligences is a frame in which students' different

learning strengths, or proclivities can be used to help them process and learn information

and learn with others who think similarly. This allows students to create an environment

that reflects their own learning. The different forms of grouping suggest that students can grow significantly when such grouping approaches are coupled with differentiated instruction curriculum (VanTassel-Baska, 2016).

Another strategy that supports differentiated instruction is called a flipped classroom (Siegle, 2013). This type of differentiated instruction is geared towards gifted students. It provides gifted students with advanced content beyond their grade level. It allows students to move through materials more quickly by allowing them to skip parts they have already mastered and quickly reviewing the parts they can master easily (Siegle, 2013). The flipped classroom provides an opportunity to group gifted students in the classroom to work on projects of common interests or to interact with each other at higher levels. One of the principles of differentiated instruction is to ensure that students have meaningful respectful tasks that peak their interests which focus on important understandings or principles that require students to think and engage in their curiosity (Wu, 2013). Siegle (2013) and Wu (2013) provide beneficial strategies that can be used for differentiated instruction in order to keep the students engaged in their learning.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy where students are assigned to small groups to complete a task, solve a problem together, analyze a scenario, complete a project, or take a test (Genc & Sahin, 2015). Cooperative learning emerges when students gather in a group in order to reach a common goal. However, each member of the group can only reach their goal only if all the other members reach their own learning goals. Each member is responsible for the outcome of their shared goal (Altun, 2015).

Cooperative learning consists of group work that, when properly structured by an instructor, encourages deeper learning, interdependence and individual accountability (Lange, Costley, & Han, 2016). Cooperative learning emphasizes a team approach in which the group effort decides the success of the team (Cobb, 2016). The group effort produced through collaboration has shown to be more effective in producing high levels of student achievement than the individual effort.

The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member in the group a stronger individual. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups that help students work together to maximize team learning. There are five basic elements of cooperative learning: (a) positive interdependence, (b) individual accountability, (c) face-to-face interaction, (d) interpersonal and small-group skills, (e) and group processing (Cobb, 2016). Cooperative learning also builds diversity awareness among students providing opportunities for students to work with a variety of classmates. Cobb (2016) found that cooperative learning could be effective in encouraging student interactions while developing positive attitudes toward school and student achievement. When students are placed in cooperative learning or small groups, they interact with peers they otherwise might never have socialized with. In order for students to practice group cohesion, teachers need to create a learner-centered environment where students feel comfortable interacting with other group members without any perceived threats associated with the interaction (Lange et al., 2016). During the cooperative learning setting, students have the opportunity to develop a supportive learning culture in which students help each other learn. Members of the groups are encouraged to use each other

as resources to allow the learners to go deeper and richer with learning materials

(Hentges, 2016). The cooperative learning structure provides an engaged social setting

for reluctant learners to enthusiastically search for meaningful connections with identified

learning goals.

Misconceptions of Differentiated Instruction

Because there are increasing demands for teachers to attain high standards for

students, teachers must employ strategies that will obtain those high standards. Although

differentiated instruction is a strategy that can attain those goals, there are misconceptions

about differentiated instruction. The misconceptions of differentiated instruction are

differentiated instruction is just another new fad that will fade away, it requires a separate

lesson plan, and it is not worth the effort.

The misconception of differentiated instruction is just another fad that will fade

away is further from the truth. Differentiated instruction has been around for years from

the beginning of one-room schoolhouses. At that time, differentiated instruction was

being conducted, however it was not called that (Birnie, 2015). Effective teachers have

always addressed students' varying needs and interests to help them succeed through the

primary use of differentiated instruction (Birnie, 2015). As long as this remains the aim,

the students will achieve.

The misconception of differentiated instructions means making lesson plans for

every student is the most pervasive misconception about differentiated instruction.

Within classes, students fall within at least four different manageable ranges. Within

those manageable ranges, there are approaches which can be successfully used for

differentiated instruction such as stations, centers, and tiered activities (Birnie, 2015).

Through these manageable activities, there is no need for separate lesson plans for every

student.

The misconception of differentiation is not worth the effort is not true even

though it requires hard work. Although the purpose of differentiated instructions is to

benefit all students, it requires hard work and preparation on behalf of the teachers.

Differentiated instructions is not simply an instructional strategy or teaching model, but it

is a way of thinking about teaching and learning. The teachers begin where the students

are and not where they should be (Birnie, 2015). Differentiated instruction is a way of

thinking that challenges how educators envision assessment, teaching, and learning.

Effects of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is important because over the course of the decade there

has been research conducted about how children learn to read. The evidence showed

there were correlational evidence that consistently showed that some types of instruction

was more effective than others. For example, Watts-Taffe et al. (2013) randomly

assigned teachers to either differentiate their reading instruction or to teach whole group.

The studies showed that from kindergarten through third grade, students made greater

gains when their teacher differentiated the instruction using small flexible learning

groups during a center or station time, than students whose teacher provided high-quality

but primarily whole-group instruction. Ideas from this study will be applied to my

project.

A large urban school district which consisted of district wide low reading scores was mandated to establish a comprehensive program for its reading program to improve student scores. A core reading program was selected by the school district which allocated large amounts of time for whole group reading, small group differentiated instruction, and independent learning. Although the district's reading scores were lower than some of the other affluent schools in the district, the need for further differentiated instruction was pitted against the realities of limited teaching time and the need for more knowledge on how to differentiate instruction amongst the students (Watts-Taffe et al., 2013). This is also the case at the school of focus.

Little, McCoach, and Reis (2014) conducted a study which examined the effects on achievement on an instructional approach which involved differentiated instruction and supported, extensive independent reading. With the approaches, regular reading instruction was eliminated. The study was conducted in four different middle schools which consisted of 47 teachers and 2150 students. The students were administered pretest and posttest assessments on reading and comprehension fluency through the use of the Hierarchical Linear Modeling procedures to investigate the effects of the intervention. The results of the study indicated that the differentiated intervention resulted in similar or higher scores for fluency and similar scores for comprehension when compared with regular reading groups. Thus, differentiated instruction in this case the effects were minimal.

Shaunessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, and Lindo (2015) examined the effects of differentiated instruction on a reading approach on fourth grade students' reading

comprehension and attitudes toward reading. Eight title one schools in an urban school district were involved in the study. Schools were randomly assigned to either a treatment which used the Schoolwide Enrichment Model-Reading (SEM-R) or they were assigned control which used the district curriculum. SEM-R was implemented by the treatment teachers for one academic year whereas continually used the district curriculum. According to an analysis of students' posttest reading comprehension scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and attitudes toward reading as measured by Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey, there were no significant differences in students' attitudes toward reading. However, SEM-R students had significantly higher scores on the comprehension posttest compared with the students in the control schools.

Firmender, Reis, and Sweeny (2013) examined the range of reading fluency and comprehension scores from students in five diverse elementary schools. This consisted of over 1100 students, including gifted and talented students. The results of the research revealed a wide range of comprehension scores across all the schools who participated. Students in Grade 3 range were 9.2, students in grade 4 range were 11.3, and students in Grade 5 range were 11.6. There was also a similar wide range of reading fluency scores across all the elementary schools as students scored from below the 10th percentile to above the 90th percentile. The results of the research study indicated the need of teachers to differentiate reading content and instruction to allow students to make continuous progress in reading to diverse students including gifted and talented students.

Differentiated Instruction through Adaptive Teaching

Adaptive teaching is another form of differentiated instruction. Adaptive teaching means teachers adjust their instruction in real time to meet the specific needs of individual students or the demands of the situation in which they find themselves (Parsons, Dodman, & Burrowbridge, 2013). Although teachers may effectively differentiate their instruction, not only do they carefully plan instruction to differentiate for the variety of learners in their class, but also provide moment by moment adaptations to meet the specific needs that became clear during the instruction. These needs that arise were or could not be anticipated (Parsons et al., 2013).

The foundation of differentiated instruction is planning. However, a teacher cannot account for everything. Therefore, teachers must be able to be responsive to unanticipated issues that arise when the differentiated plans are placed into action. The teacher must then monitor student progress and adapt instruction based upon students' needs and instructional situations (Parsons et al., 2013).

Reading Strategies in Social Studies for Differentiation

Content areas like social studies require different reading strategies because social studies text present complex vocabulary within unfamiliar text structures, and can present unique challenges. However, evidence suggests that reading instruction in social studies can improve student understanding and learning (Groundwater, 2016). A variety of strategies are suggested to enhance progress.

A strategy by the name of R2-3E is a reading strategy utilized in social studies. R2-R3 is where the student is told to read the text twice, extract information from what

they read, explain what was read, and extend the text by providing a summary of what they read (Groundwater, 2016). This strategy provides a platform to model expert reading and meaningful literacy strategies through a sustained collaboration between the teacher and students. In the R2-3E it is important for the teacher to provide explicit instruction, modeling expert reading and demonstrating the process in order for the students to be provided plenty of opportunities for guided practice until they become comfortable with the process. The expected outcome of this strategy is for students to be able to pull out many ideas of the text by focusing on key details, words, and phrases (Groundwater, 2016). The most important part of the R2-3E strategy is that it provides an opportunity for students to learn how to summarize informational text.

The R2-3E strategy has a specific process. The R2-3E strategy examines one paragraph at a time. This is where the teachers allow students to draw a line across the page and under each paragraph to provide a visual divider and to help students focus on one chunk of paragraph or section at a time. This is beneficial for the students who become overwhelmed when they encounter lengthy text. In the R2-3E strategy the teacher reads the paragraph and the students listen. The teacher then reads the same paragraph again, only this time the students highlight key or important words and circle new or unfamiliar words. The students then extract the information by sharing circled and highlighted words. Next the students explain by defining their circled words, analyzing the paragraph by discussing the highlighted words to determine important information. Lastly, the students extend their learning by creating a dictionary, word wall, summarize paragraphs or summarize an entire passage. The outcome of the strategy allows students

to write a summary sentence for each paragraph and then combine those sentences into a paragraph that summarizes the entire passages. Also, in addition to summarizing, R2-3E works with other reading skills such as cause and effect, problem and solution, compare and contrast, and sequence (Groundwater, 2016). In summary, the R2-3E focus is to help students define unfamiliar words, extract important information, and help summarize their new learning which allows them to become more competent in extricating and summarizing important information on their own.

Project Description

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

As the researcher, I will be a vital part of addressing the policy of social promotion and help teachers improve instruction by implementing the application of reading strategies in Social Studies through differentiated instruction using cooperative learning that will stimulate a gain in student achievement. The researcher will be called upon to implement the professional development for teachers in grades three through five with the support of the administration.

Potential Barriers

Although we plan for perfection, sometimes the most thought out professional development can include barriers. Teacher buy-in is one factor that may be a barrier for the professional development. This will be a barrier because most teachers tend to only attend professional development sessions because it is mandated and have had poor experiences. The teachers may put up a wall no matter how well the professional

development may be organized. However, I will work to provide meaningful information for the teachers to encourage meaningful participation.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of this project will begin during the 2018-2019 school year. In order for the implementation of this project to occur, several actions must take place in the following order:

1. May 2018 - The findings and implications of the study will be presented to the principal and assistant principal of the focus school. The three day professional development plan will also be presented.

2. July 2018 – An e-mail will be sent out to the third through fifth grade teachers detailing the contents of the professional development sessions.

3. July 2018 – The principal will send out his annual welcome back letter which will include the professional development dates.

4. August 2018 – Third through fifth grade teachers will be provided with their session dates, times, and room number on the first day back at school which will consist of three consecutive days

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities will be shared by myself, teachers, and administrators. My responsibility is to create the professional development sessions and supporting documents. It will also be my responsibility to make sure the goals of the professional development are carried out as well as securing the room and equipment for myself to present. The teachers' role is to attend and actively participate in the

professional development. The teachers also have a responsibility to collaborate with their colleagues and to implement the new reading strategies in their social studies lessons. Lastly, the role of the administrators will be to support the professional development and assure that any materials needed are readily available.

Project Evaluation Plan

The proposed professional development plan was established in order to provide third through fifth grade teachers with reading strategies to apply in social studies for differentiated instruction. It would be important that I allow the teachers an opportunity to evaluate the professional development session. Feedback from evaluations will be used to revise future professional development.

The teachers who attend the professional development will receive an evaluation sheet that is formative in nature after each professional development session. They will then be asked to turn it into me. The evaluation will help to determine how to improve for future professional development sessions. The results will be analyzed and given to the principal. The evaluations will give an overview of whether the professional developments were effective. This will therefore guide my directions for future professional developments to new teachers who are employed by the school.

The overall goals of the professional development is for teachers to receive reading strategies for social studies to use for differentiated instruction in cooperative learning groups. The overall evaluation goals are to allow teachers to voice their opinion on whether the professional development was helpful. The key stakeholders include the teachers, administrators, and third through fifth grade students.

Project Implications

The expected implication for social change is to address the policy of social promotion that will work best for students and teachers and help teachers improve implementation of differentiated instruction to support improved student achievement particularly for socially promoted students who often struggle with reading content. Teachers are the ones who are on the forefront in education working with students daily. Therefore, it is their responsibility to ensure they carryout effective methods of teaching such as differentiated instruction by giving them a quality education in order to prepare the students for society. The professional development I created offered a three day session that provides third through fifth grade teachers reading strategies to apply during social studies for differentiated instruction in cooperative learning groups.

The project was initiated due to the concerns of students who were underachieving in almost all their subject areas. In addition, teachers were in need of assistance of how to implement differentiated instruction through reading strategies in social studies. The professional development will assist in strengthening the skill level of the teachers to improve their differentiated instruction skills to assist in improving student achievement. School districts across the county, as well as the state and country also struggle with improving student achievement. Social justice will be created by presenting the professional development which provides teachers with relevant information on differentiated instruction. Social justice will be carried on to students in school districts across the country.

Section 3 includes the development and details of the professional development project that focused on the problem of the study (See Appendix A). This section includes an introduction, project goals, and a rationale for conducting the project. A review of literature is included to support the content of the project which includes the potential barriers, implementation, roles and responsibilities. Section 4 will conclude the study with a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

I used a qualitative research method to conduct this study to explore the

perspectives of teachers on social promotion in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate

what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving, socially

promoted students within the school. Section 4 consists of a review of the projects

strengths and limitations. This section also includes recommendations for ways to address

the problem, what I learned about scholarship, project development and evaluation as

well as leadership change.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this project study is that it is addresses the problem at the focus

school and could provide other schools within the district teachers' perspectives on social

promotion and retention and what can be done to improve the achievement of students

who are low academically. Generally teachers work with students who are passed along

from grade to grade without acquiring the content for the current grade and previous

grades; this process contributes to the low achievement scores reported by the school. For

years they have voiced their concerns, but they have gone unheard. This study and project

will help teachers deal with low achievement and provide a professional development to

assist with a strategy to improve student achievement. The project provides professional

development on incorporating differentiated instruction of reading strategies in social

studies through cooperative learning groups. The first half of the first day of the

professional development will focus on the teacher complaints of social promotion. In the

second half of the first day, the professional development will begin and continue through Day 3.

Although the project has its strengths, there are also limitations. The teachers will be provided with the social studies reading strategies for cooperative learning at the professional development, but they may still need additional assistance with the actual implementation of it within the classroom. They may need assistance on how to set it up, when to fit it in their daily class schedule, and a model of how it should flow in their class.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are alternative approaches that can be used to remediate the limitations. An alternative approach would be to provide samples of differentiated lesson plans in a curriculum resource book for the teachers to access after they have been led through actual social studies differentiated instruction strategies. In addition, I can have the administrators hire someone to come in and to conduct the professional development. The plan for the professional development included as the culmination of this study would be the most effective choice for addressing the problem.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Over the course of this process, my role as a teacher changed throughout the years. Previously I taught third, second, and first grades and now currently I teach fifth grade. Spending time in the different grades allowed me to experience social promotion and retention from the lower end of the grade levels to the upper end of the grade levels.

In teaching these grades, I was able to experience the problem of social promotion, retention, and low student achievement. I had students who were socially promoted to my class who should have been retained in the lower grades. I myself have also tried to retain students while teaching the lower grades but to no avail because parents refuse to allow them to be retained. On the other spectrum while teaching the fifth grade, retention is based on obtaining a level 1 – beginner on the GMAS tests in language arts and math. However, even if a student is still not successful on the retake in summer school they're still socially promoted to the sixth grade. At this point, I have really realized that if the students are going to be socially promoted anyway and not retained, then something needs to be done to help them be successful; thus I decided to assume the role of making a change. Due to my research I now have a more comprehensive understanding of social promotion and retention. This higher understanding has allowed me to construct a solution to improve student achievement.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a practitioner, I achieved a huge appreciation from completing this study. At the beginning of this journey I struggled to understand the expectations of a scholar. However, as the journey continued my understanding became clear and it now brings me great pleasure. Throughout the study the influence of my opinions and personal biases challenged my work. However, I learned to understand to keep them out of the study while focusing on the facts presented in the study from the related literature reviews. Through this scholarly research I learned the problem of social promotion and retention and low student achievement is expanded far beyond my focus school.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As I developed this research, self-analysis became involved based on the issues I was most interested in and the challenges I faced. The challenges I faced were the amount of time, work, and detail that was required to complete the project study. In addition, the degree of research necessary to thoroughly understand the issues involved was extensive because although the project study was about social promotion and addressing low student achievement, it was also necessary to explore its opposite, grade retention. In order to develop the appropriate type of project study there was an exploration of my questions of interests which entailed constant consideration and refinement. Throughout the research process, paying attention to every detail of the data collection and coding was essential in order to ensure the data was reliable. During the interpretation section, the process of using the data and applying findings to the project study required me to expand my understanding of both the data and its effective application to the project study. Finally, ensuring that the program developed to improve student achievement for socially promoted students is evaluated for success or any necessary changes.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Engaging in research and data collection has contributed to my understanding of what it means to be a scholar. One of the major innovations I have made in scholarship is how to effectively analyze collected data. As I have completed the different research stages, I have come to realize that I conduct research on a regular basis. However, it is not completed in a methodical way with no goals in mind. During this doctoral journey, reflection has become the most important. This doctoral journey has allowed me to reflect

on my doctoral work and has allowed me to move forward. One phase of the doctoral study that was difficult was time management. However, this obstacle was overcome due to the support of my chair, which has now allowed me to complete my doctoral study after 4 years. The work on this project study has expanded my interest in social promotion and retention. I am interested in pursuing future research in the alternative methods to student achievement for low level students other than social promotion and retention.

One of the most important elements I learned during the development of my project is the large amount of time it takes to develop a professional development plan. Although I created the project, it will be implemented by numerous people. These people include the administrators and teachers who will examine it and provide feedback which could lead to possible changes. Developing a project also involves considering the audience to ensure the teachers will gain valuable experience to take back to their classroom.

As I collected and analyzed the data, I found that my personal experience was similar to how other teachers were experiencing the same problem. Along with the acquisition of this knowledge, it allowed me to further validate through the literature review to understand how a solution to the problem was necessary. I took on the leadership role and led the charge by speaking to the administration staff to make changes to social promotion and retention within the school to ensure student achievement improves. Although I am unsure of how my findings will go, I am confident that this project will create a renewed awareness within my school culture. I am confident in this

project because as a teacher myself I have seen students being socially promoted from grade to grade without acquiring the knowledge necessary for the next grade and it only lends to students falling further behind. I too, as a teacher, understand there needs to be change in order for students to achieve. This project will allow for the necessary changes needed to improve student achievement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

This project has a potential for impacting social change. The problem that has been seen is inadequate academic progress of socially promoted students who have not met the requirements of expected test score levels and or coursework. This project focused on one school to make a change that can address the policy of social promotion and help teachers improve instruction that is designed to stimulate a gain in student achievement.

The goal of this study was to create a project that increased student achievement among students who were socially promoted or retained through the incorporation of differentiated instruction of reading strategies in social studies cooperative learning groups. Ultimately, I feel this project could be implemented throughout the entire school district for the schools who have low student achievement. Additionally, the professional development will need to be ongoing and the program will need to be evaluated and reviewed to ensure student achievement is improving. Future research should look at the quantitative data to ensure that low achieving students are improving. I would also like to

recommend a follow up study at the end of the first year of the implementation of the program.

Conclusion

Section 4 provided reflections and conclusions of the project that focused on its limitations, strengths, and recommendations. I also provided an analysis of what I learned about scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change. The next type of analysis I completed were of what I learned about myself as a scholar, practitioner, and a project developer. Although there is not one answer that can fix the problems and challenges of social promotion and retention, educators will continue to work toward solving these problems one solution at a time.

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Appendix A: Project

Differentiated Instruction of Reading Strategies in Social Studies Through

Cooperative Learning Groups

Program Goals

Review with teachers the foundations of differentiated instruction.

Provide teachers with the necessary skills to implement differentiated instruction

of reading strategies in Social Studies.

Provide on-going support of teachers once they are in the classroom in the

beginning stages of implementation and continuously as needed.

Program Outcomes

A.1. Teachers will understand the foundations of differentiated instruction.

B.1. Teachers will be provided with the necessary skills to implement reading

strategies in Social Studies through differentiated instruction.

C.1.Teachers will be provided extra support of the implementation of the

differentiated instruction of the reading strategies in social studies in an on-going basis as

necessary.

Program Objectives

A.1.a. As a result of the review of differentiated instruction teachers will be able

to identify the components of differentiated instruction.

B.1.a. As a result of teachers implementing differentiated instruction in their

classrooms, teachers will be provided with reading strategies to implement with Social

Studies.

C.1.a. As a result of the professional development, teachers will have a main

contact for additional support within the building.

Professional Development Seminar Schedule

This professional development seminar will occur over the course of three

professional development days 2018-2019.

Day 1: Review of Data and Differentiated Instruction

Time	Activity
08:00-09:30	Participants will gather in the school media center. The presentation will begin with an introduction of the review of the data from the project study.
09:30-10:00	Snack and Restroom Break
10:00-11:30	Review of the data from the project study continues - teachers will be put into small groups to discuss findings and offer suggestions about social promotion policy that you can present to the administration
11:30-12:30	Lunch on your own
12:30-02:00	Review of differentiated instruction. An excerpt Carol Tomlinson explaining differentiated instruction will be shown in a short video. Following differentiated instruction will be explained by definition and how it is used to guide instruction.
02:00-02:15	Snack and restroom break
02:15-03:00	The presentation will be wrapped up with a discussion about differentiated instruction and cooperative learning and how cooperative learning can support differentiated instruction.

Day 2: Reading Strategies for Social Studies

Time	Activity
08:00-09:30	Participants will be introduced and actively participating in a demonstration of the "Teaching Paraphrasing with Social Studies Content" reading strategy – This strategy teaches students how to paraphrase social studies content from excerpts provided to them.
09:30-10:00	Snack and Restroom Break
10:00-11:30	Participants will be introduced and actively participating in a demonstration of how to "Analyze Primary Sources" analysis being a reading strategy. This strategy teaches students how to analyze photos of primary sources from social studies content just as they would in reading.
11:30-12:30	Lunch on your own
12:30-02:00	Participants will be introduced and actively participating in a demonstration of the "Circle of Five" which teaches how to summarize social studies quotes.
02:00-02:15	Snack and restroom break
02:15-03:00	The presentation will be wrapped up with discussion about differentiated instruction and cooperative learning and how cooperative learning can support differentiated instruction.

Day 3: More Reading Strategies for Social Studies

Time	Activity
08:00-09:30	Participants will be introduced and actively participating in a demonstration of the "Preview and Predict of Social Studies Content of Placards (pictures) of Different Time Periods" in which students will be presented with pictures of different time periods in social studies and are asked to preview and predict what is happening in the photo.
09:30-10:00	Snack and Restroom Break
10:00-11:30	Participants will be introduced and actively participate in a demonstration of how to "How to Teach Vocabulary in Social Studies"
11:30-12:30	Lunch on your own
12:30-02:00	Participants will be introduced and actively participating in a demonstration of the "Making Connections through Historical Figures" where students will be asked to make connections of different historical figures from different time periods.
02:00-02:15	Snack and restroom break
02:15-03:00	The presentation will be wrapped up with the Formative Feedback and Summative Survey.

Evaluation 1: Formative Feedback

Participant Name:

School:

Please answer each question to help maximize the usefulness of these sessions.

1 – Not helpful   2 – Somewhat helpful   3 – Very helpful

Teacher speaker   1   2   3

Material Presented   1   2   3

Active Participation   1   2   3

Overall Experience   1   2   3

Any additional information that you wish to share to make this experience more

helpful to others.

_____

_____

Evaluation 2: Formative Evaluation

Name:

School:

Please provide a thorough answer to each question

Did your social studies differentiated instruction cooperative learning groups work the way you expected them to work?

What reactions did you receive from the students when you provided the social studies differentiated cooperative learning groups?

What obstacles did you face when incorporating the socials studies differentiated instruction cooperative learning groups?

What went well with social studies differentiated instruction cooperative learning groups?

What additional feedback would you like to share after the implementation of your social studies differentiated instruction cooperative learning groups?

What information would you like to add that may be helpful to others in the future when implementing and reflection of the social studies differentiated instruction cooperative learning groups?

Trainer Notes for Day 1

Overview of Project Study Data and Differentiated Instruction

The trainer will attend to the following tasks at the beginning of the Day 1, before the presentation:

Welcome participants and explain that this is a 3-day professional development program that will help them incorporate reading strategies in social studies through differentiated instruction and will leave on the third day with strategies to assist with school improvement in their own context. Explain that the first day will include information about the data results from the study and an overview of differentiated instruction. There will be small groups to discuss the study findings and report out to the big group. The groups will be set up by each teacher drawing a number from 1-5. All the 1's will work together, all the 2's will work together, and so forth. There will also be a discussion about what teachers would like to do about the policy and a discussion to address the discontent with social promotion. The subsequent days will be more tailored to reading strategies in social studies through differentiated instruction.

Please remember that the slide shows are simply a frame for the day's activities. I will be in a presentational mode for a most of the day, but the slides are used to help provide vital information for participants to engage in the activities.

• All relevant information for participants will be contained on the slide shows and the handouts of the presentations that the participants will receive during each session.

• The presentation/handouts clearly indicate when each type of material will be needed for the sessions. Review each slide deck at the beginning of the day to ensure to have all materials in place.

Slide shows are found for day 1 on the following pages of the appendix:

o Day 1: Overview of Project Study Data, page 159-160

Overview of Differentiated Instruction, page 160

Reading Strategies in Social Studies Through Differentiated Instruction

The Differentiated Classroom

On o
"Cor

1

Day One

- Overview of Project Study Data

    - Perspectives of Socially Promoted Students
        - Too far behind academically
            - Struggling students
            - Concerns about age

    - Perspectives of Retained Students
        - Standards not met

2

Day One

- Overview of Project Study Data

  - Methods used for Socially Promoted and Retained Students
    - Differentiated Instruction in Cooperative Learning Groups

  - Analysis of Lesson Plans

3

Day One

- Overview of Differentiated Instruction

  - Carol Tomlinson Video
  - Definition
  - How Differentiated Instruction Should Be Used to Guide Instruction

4

Trainer Notes for Day 2

Reading Strategies in Social Studies through Differentiated Instruction

The trainer will attend to the following tasks at the beginning of the Day 2, before the presentation:

Welcome participants to the second day of the PD that will help them learn about reading strategies through differentiated activities in social studies and leave on the third day with a concrete plan to assist with school improvement in their own context. Explain that in today's sessions the presenter will tailor sessions to the interests of all participants which are the reading strategies. The presenter will model accepting and encouraging all ideas presented by the participants as they would do with their students. As the teachers are engaged in their activities, the presenter will circulate and assists participants in their groups.

Slide shows are found for day 2 on the following pages of the appendix:

o Day 2: Teaching Paraphrasing with Social Studies content, page 162

Analysis of Primary Sources, page 166

Summarization of "Circle of Five", page 169

Day Two – Reading Strategies

- Teaching **Paraphrasing** with Social Studies Content
  - Declaration of Independence Excerpts
    - Presenter models for teachers how to teach paraphrasing to students using social studies content excerpts as an example
    - In small groups, teachers will practice paraphrasing the excerpts as if they were the students
    - Teachers will share their paraphrased excerpts out to the other groups

5

Teaching Paraphrasing with Social Studies Content – Handout

Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence:

Excerpt 1:	Excerpt 2:
"When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."	"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
Excerpt 3:	Excerpt 5:
"To secure these (basic) rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…"	"The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having, in direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States."

Excerpt 7:	Excerpt 8:
"In every state of these oppressions, we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people."	"We, therefore…solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states…"

KEY: Declaration of Independence Meaning

Excerpt 1: When one group of people is going to break away from a country to form its own nation, then they should explain why they are doing it.

Excerpt 2: Individuals have some basic rights that are obvious and that should not be taken away. Freedom for example, is one of those rights.

Excerpt 3: Governments are formed to make sure people's rights are protected. Government power should come from the people.

Excerpt 4: When a government is taking away the rights of citizens and is not doing what the people want, then the citizens have the right to change or replace the government.

Excerpt 5: England has repeatedly interfered with colonists' rights. In doing so, it has unfairly ruled over the American colonies.

Excerpt 6: Here is proof that England has interfered with colonial rights: the king has not allowed laws that help colonists the most.

Excerpt 7: Every time we colonists felt we were being treated unfairly, we wrote the King. He answered by treating us more unfairly. A ruler who abuses his power should not be able to rule us.

Excerpt 8: We now consider ourselves to be an independent country.

Day Two – Reading Strategies

- **Analysis** of Primary Sources
  - Presenter models for teachers how to teach students to analyze primary sources to students using social studies content visuals through the use of cue card prompts
  - In small groups, teachers will practice analyzing primary sources as if they were the students
  - Teachers will share their analysis of primary sources out to the other groups

6

Analysis of Primary Sources - Handout & Primary Source Photos

|	
Look closely at the pieces. What are the important details? Is anything unique or unusual? Look for clues that might help you determine meaning. How does this information further your understanding of the image?	What is the main subject or topic? What might the image be related to? What is your general impression of the visual? How does this information further your understanding of this image?
How do the parts relate to and interact with each other? Is anything exaggerated? If so, why? Do titles or captions help you determine connections & relationships within the image? How does this information further your understanding of the image?	Read the title or caption if there is one. What information does this give you? Is irony or sarcasm used? How does this information further your understanding of the image?
What is the main idea or topic? What is the message or purpose? What conclusion/s can you make? Summarize the image in one or two sentences. How does this information further your understanding of the image?	

Analysis Source Photos

Civil War Diaries
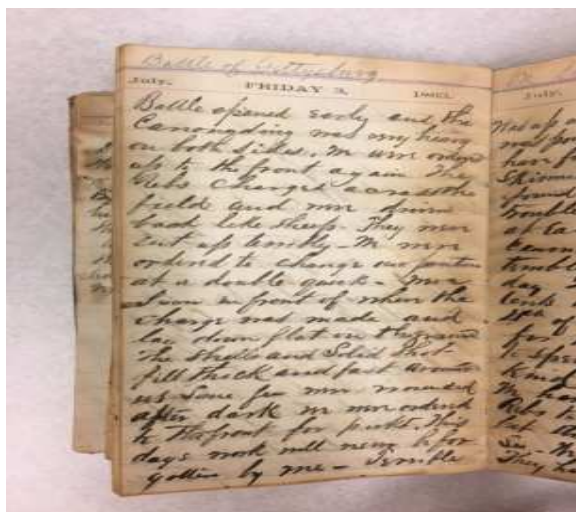
Teddy Roosevelt's Letter to Son
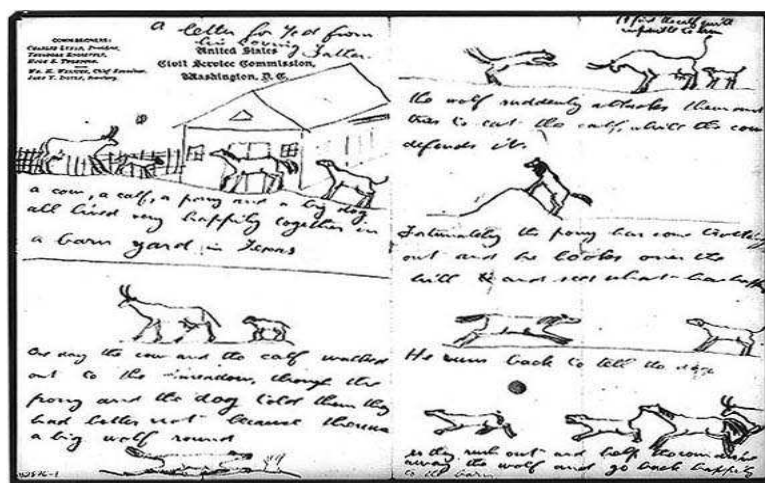
Day Two – Reading Strategies

- **Summarization** of "Circle of Five"

- Presenter will provide participants with different quotes. Participants will form a circle of FIVE by working with others who have the same quote.

- Participants will work with their group to SUMMARIZE:
  - what they learned about and from the quote
  - questions, ideas or issues the document raised
  - why this quote is important

7

Summarization of Circle of Five - Handouts

Directions: Primary Source Circle

Roles and Responsibilities:

1 – Author (High level student)

2 – Audience (Low level student)

3 – Time researcher (On level student)

4 – Vocabulary specialist (On level

student)

5 – Significance (High level student)

Form a circle of FIVE by working and recording with others who have the

same quote.

Work with your group to SUMMARIZE:

what you learned about and from the quote

questions, ideas or issues the document raised

why this quote is important

Quotes:

"I wish I could say that racism and prejudice were only distant memories. We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent from the apathy. We must dissent from the fear, the hatred and the mistrust.... We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better."

> **Thurgood Marshall**
> **Liberty Medal Acceptance Speech**
> **Independence Hall, Philadelphia, PA**
> **July 4, 1992**

"You know my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled by the iron feet of oppression. There comes a time my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amid the piercing chill of an alpine November. There comes a time."

> **Rev. Martin Luther King**
> **Montgomery Bus Boycott Speech**
> **Holt Baptist Church December 5, 1955**

"People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

> **Rosa Parks**

Trainer Notes for Day 3

Reading Strategies in Social Studies through Differentiated Instruction

The trainer will attend to the following tasks at the beginning of the Day 3, before the presentation:

Greet the participants to welcome them to the third and final day of the 3- day PD. The third day continues the reading strategies for differentiated instruction in social studies. The trainer will continue to circulate and assist participants within their groups with their activities. The role of the presenter is one of the facilitator who will assist participants with their activity efforts. I will also place a box at the front of the room to collect formative and summative assessment products at the end of session.

Slide shows are found for day 3 on the following pages of the appendix:

o Day 3: Preview and Predict of Social Studies Placards, page 173

Teaching Vocabulary in Social Studies, page 176

Making Connections through Historical Artifacts, page 183

Day Three – Reading Strategies

- **Preview and Predict** of Social Studies Content of Placards
  - The Dust Bowl
    - Presenter will have participants in their groups preview the social studies photos and predict what is happening
    - Participants will then read the excerpt about the photo to determine if their predictions are correct and respond to the question presented.
    - Participants will share their predictions and question responses out to the other groups

8

Preview and Prediction of Social Studies Content of Placards –The Dust Bowl –

Handouts

The Dust Bowl had a significant impact on many aspects of life. Children heard their parents worry about money and food. They would play with anything they could find. Young children had to do much of the work if they lived on a farm, like feeding the animals, and milking the cows. Older children helped their parents with the chores, like mowing the grass, making clothes, and anything else they were asked to do.

People had a difficult time making a living. Some people raised money by selling their personal belongings. Many moved to California.

How did things change during the Dust Bowl?

During the Dust Bowl, getting enough food for your family was difficult. Sometimes people with no homes went to public parks and ate there. Some of these parks had areas where people could build fires and cook. People shared with others. Some would bring a kettle for water and someone else might bring whatever food they had to add to the meal. When eating they placed a plate over their drink to keep out the dust. Some people would even eat under a damp sheet to keep the dust out of their food!

How did people deal with the limited amount of available food?

Day Three – Reading Strategies

- Teaching **Vocabulary** in Social Studies
  - After the teacher introduces the vocabulary to the students the following activities will take place among the different groups.
    - Dust Bowl Sort Cards – Low level students
      - Students practice the definitions of the vocabulary through sorting the cards
    - Dust Bowl Sentence Sort – On level students
      - Students practice vocabulary through the use of context clues in sentences
    - Dust Bowl Terms to Teach – High level students
      - Students practice the vocabulary by acting out the terms for their vocabulary words. They will share their actions with their peers. This activity ensures students have mastered comprehension of vocabulary

9

Teaching Vocabulary in Social Studies - Handouts

Vocabulary Sort – Low level students

Cards will be cut and shuffled; students will match the correct picture with its meaning

	causing much damage
	a period of dry weather, especially **a long one that is injurious to crops.**

	the process by which the surface of the earth is worn away by theaction of water, glaciers, winds, waves, etc
	weakened, diminished, or damaged

Vocabulary Sentence Sort – On-Level Students

Cards will be cut and shuffled; students will then have to match the correct word with its sentence.

Erosion	Farmers started planting their fields in ways that would limit _____ and keep rain water in the soil, and so it would not blow away.
Irrigation	Farmers learned new methods and techniques such as _____ of crops.
Migrated	Many families _____ to California
Destructive	The Dust Bowl is a series of _____ wind and dust storms that hit the United States of America in the 1930's.
Transform	…so the Dust Bowl had taught us another lesson; namely that bare ground exposed to the sun will _____ warm breezes into fiery blasts.
Drought	The Dust Bowl was mainly in the _____ stricken states of Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

vegetation	The hot wind seemed to rob all _____ of its vitality.
vitality	The hot wind seemed to rob all vegetation of its _____.
gales	…with the _____ came the dust. Sometimes it was so thick that is completely hid the sun.
impaired	...with my financial resources at last exhausted and my health seriously, if not permanently _____, I am at last ready to admit defeat and leave the Dust Bowl forever.
moribund	Many patients who are taken there at last by relatives are _____ when admitted and die within a few hours.
oppressed	My head ached, my stomach was upset, and my lungs were _____ and felt as if they must contain a ton of fine dirt.

Vocabulary Active Learning – High level students

Students will line up in two rows facing each other. Each student facing each other will be given the same word and will create an action that matches the definition of that word. At the signal of the teacher, only the students on one side will step to their right and demonstrate the meaning of their word to the student they are facing and the other student will do the same. The students will keep rotating right until they end back at the beginning and have shared their demonstration with their opposite facing peers.

destructive – causing great damage
transform – to change in form, appearance, or structure
drought – a period of dry weather, especially a long one that is injurious to crops
vegetation – all the plants or plant life of a place, taken as a whole:
vitality – power to live or grow
gale – very strong wind
impaired – weakened or damaged

moribund – in a dying state; near death.

oppressed – subject to a burdensome or harsh exercise of authority or power

erosion – the process by which the surface of the earth is worn away by the action of water

irrigation – the artificial application of water to land to assist in the production of crops

migrate – to go from one country, region, or place to another

Day Three – Reading Strategies

- **Making Connections** Through Historical Artifacts
  - Presenter models for teachers how to teach the students make connection in history using historical artifacts by selecting two and discussing how they are connected.
    - For example: John Brown's Raid and slavery; presenter will discuss how they are connected in history
    - Teachers will practice making the connections with other artifacts provided

10

Making Connections Through Historical Artifacts

John Brown's Raid

Abolitionist who wanted to free
slaves by any means

Planned to take weapons from
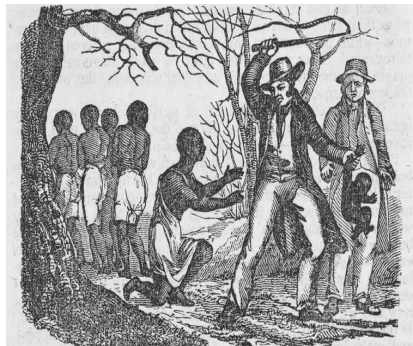arsenal at Harper's Ferry to arm
a slave rebellion

Federal troops responded;
Brown and supporters where
executed for treason

State's Rights

Amount of power state government has in relation to power held by the federal government

Became a rallying cry for secession; Lincoln viewed secession as an illegal act
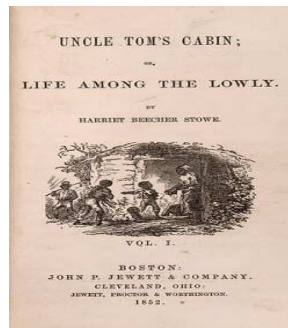Led to debates over slavery and Tariffs

Slavery

Series of failed compromises tried to balance this issue as people moved West

North and South division grew over this issue; South felt it was a right to be determined by the states

Major cause of Civil War

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Anti-slavery novel by Harriet
Beecher Stowe; published in
1852

Impact was instant and divisive;
convinced many that slavery
was morally wrong

Slave owners wanted to
discredit it

Day Three – Reading Strategies

- Formative Survey
  - Please complete and return to specified bin

- Summative Survey
  - Please complete and return to specified bin

11

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Process

Each interviewee will be taken to a comfortable spot that is private. I will give each interviewee the list of questions to look at as I ask them. I will explain that I will be audio-taping the interview and ask for their permission. I will e-mail a copy of the transcript and ask them to read it and confirm if it is correct or suggest corrections.

Introduction and Welcome

Good day. Thank you for participating in my research study. This interview will last 45-60 minutes and with your permission, I will audiotape it for my later analysis. I thank you for your participation. Just a reminder, the purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of teachers on social promotion and grade retention in Grades 3 through 5 and to investigate what teachers think can be done to improve achievement of low achieving students, specifically socially promoted students within the school.

Interview Questions

How long have you been teaching?

What grades/subject are you teaching now?

What is your perspective on social promotion based on your experiences? Describe some experiences.

How do you decide when to promote students to the next grade level even though they have not demonstrated the necessary skills to be successful in the next school year?

Describe a situation when you feel social promotion is warranted.

Do you think the practice of social promotion is a positive or negative practice for the child involved? Explain your perspective.

How do you view students who have been socially promoted who are currently enrolled in your class? Please explain the following students' work.

In your opinion, what main criteria should be considered when deciding to socially promote a student?

In your experience, how do you think social promotion affects a child academically?

In your experience, have you felt socially promoted students were capable of keeping up with their peers or did they struggle?

What is your perspective on grade retention based on your experiences? Describe some experiences.

How do you decide when to retain students at your school when they have not demonstrated the necessary skills to be successful in the next grade?

Describe a situation when you feel retention is warranted?

Do you think the practice of retention is a positive or negative practice for the child involved? Explain your perspective.

How are parents involved in the decision to retain or socially promote the student?

In your opinion, what main criteria should be considered when deciding to retain a student?

In your experience, how do you think grade retention affects a child academically?

How do you make curricular changes for students who have been socially promoted? Further prompt: Do you plan for differentiating instruction?

What specific interventions are in place for socially promoted students?

What specific interventions are in place for retained students? Prompt: How do you differentiate instruction for these students?

What is your school district's policy and procedures for social promotion?

What is your school district's policy and procedures for student retention?

Have you retained students and found the extra year to be beneficial? Please explain.

What do you suggest needs to be done to help the socially promoted students who struggle?

Closing

Thank you very much for your time. You will hear from me soon to check the transcription and offer any other ideas you wish. I will send you a transcription of the interview via e-mail. Please check for the accuracy and presentation of your ideas. When the study is concluded, I will share my interpretation and conclusions with you and ask for your response.

Appendix C: Sample of Lesson Plan Tool

Process

I will first obtain lesson plans from teachers participating in the study based on the

subject areas they teach: reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. Then I

will review each lesson plan and check for differentiated instruction geared toward

improving socially promoted or retained students. A check mark will be placed on each

item which corresponds to improving socially promoted and retained students. Additional

notes will be handwritten if necessary.

Lesson Plan Differentiation Checklist

Lesson Plan# ___

____ Lesson plan is not differentiated

____ Lesson plan is differentiated in the following ways:

____Tiered assignments – Assignments designed to instruct students on

essential skills that are provided at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-

endedness (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003).

____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained

students

____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____Compacting - Adjusting instruction to account

for prior student mastery of learning objectives. This involves a three step process: (a)

assess the student to determine his/her level of knowledge on the material to be studied

and determine what he/she still needs to master; (b) create plans for what the student

needs to know, and excuse the student from studying what he/she already knows; and (c)

create plans for freed up time to be spent in enriched or accelerated study (Hall et al.,

2003).

_____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained

students

_____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

_____ Interest centers or interest grouping - Set up so that learning experiences are

directed toward a specific learner interest which allows students to choose a topic that is

motivating to them (Hall et al., 2003).

_____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained

students

_____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

_____ Flexible grouping – Students work as part of many different groups

depending on the task and/or content. Students are placed in groups based on readiness,

interest, and/or learning profile. This strategy allows students to work with a wide variety

of peers and keeps them from being labeled as advanced or struggling (Hall et al., 2003).

_____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained

students

____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____ Learning Contracts - An agreement between the teacher and the student in which the teacher specifies the necessary skills expected to be learned by the student and the required components of the assignment, while the student identifies methods for completing the tasks. This strategy (a) allows students to work at an appropriate pace; (b) can target learning styles; and (c) helps students work independently, learn planning skills, and eliminate unnecessary skill practice (Hall et al., 2003).

____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____ Choice Boards - Organizers that contain a variety of activities where students can choose one or several activities to complete as they learn a skill or develop a product (Hall et al., 2003).

____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____ Menu - offers students a way to make decisions about what they will do in order to meet class requirements. A menu could be for a single lesson, a week-long lesson, or even a month-long period of study (Wormeli, 2006).

____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____ Differentiation with technology - Technology and computers combine various media formats and can provide a variety of different learning opportunities. Technology based lessons lend themselves to teaching students of various learning styles (Wormeli, 2006).

____Level of activity is not geared towards socially promoted and retained students

____Level of activity is geared towards socially promoted and retained students

Notes:

_____

_____

_____