

AN INVESTIGATION INTO PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE
REPETITION AS A CORRECTIVE STRATEGY FOR LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

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A meal can only be prepared when all the ingredients are combined purposely so that even when they lose their individual existence, the infusion creates a dynamic fusion for fulfillment and satisfaction.

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Dedication

This paper is specially dedicated to my maternal grandparents the late Mr. Aaron Boysie Ramsingh and Ms Sylvia Chandoo as well as my uncles, aunts and mother, who instilled in me during my formative years the understanding that educational achievement was the only way to attain upward social mobility.

Abstract

An investigation into primary school teachers' perceptions of grade repetition as a corrective strategy for low academic achievement.

Victoria Avian Rajkumar

The process of having children repeat a grade level as a solution to remedy academic underachievement is one many researchers have termed "educational malpractice". In spite of existing literature delineating the overwhelming negative effects associated with the practice, it continues globally. Substantiated evidence shows that while teachers are the leading initiators of the strategy, their overall opinions of it are almost nonexistent. This qualitative case study describes the perceptions held by local teachers' regarding the issue of grade repetition. Data was gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with three teachers at a denominational primary school along the East-West corridor. Analysis of the data yielded codes highlighting teachers' views on the issue. Teachers spoke of some accommodations which are made to assist repeaters. They also highlighted their concerns about the strategy which included the fact that repeaters are chosen based on readiness for the next level. However, this may not always be the case and teachers remarked that systematic diagnostic assessment and interventions are needed to optimize the learning experience for all learners.

Key words: Repetition, Retention, Repeater, Social Promotion, Readiness, Differentiated instruction, Looping.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Background

In many developed and developing countries there exists a practice where children who do not meet certain predetermined standards, are not mature enough or have been identified by their parents as struggling to acquire developmental content skills are made to repeat the academic year. This strategy defined as grade repetition or grade retention is the practice of making children who have not mastered the curriculum and thus do not reach certain academic standards repeat the year while their peers are promoted to the next year (Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 5).

The utilization of grade retention or repetition is one of education's most common interventions for the "unprepared student". The Global Education Digest (2012) states that "Repetition is often considered to be a good solution if learning objectives for that grade level are not achieved." (p. 18). Retaining students in a grade is often used as a method of increasing or meeting educational standards. Many educators assume that by remediating prerequisite skills, students will be less likely to fail when they advance academically (Shepard and Smith, 1990, cited in Viland). While many studies have been conducted on the phenomena of grade repetition and results highlight the negative consequences which are associated with the strategy, Neff (2011) postulates that "retention continues to be embedded in the culture of most schools." (p. 13). Furthermore, Neff (2011, p. 13) stated that there is an existing belief that "retention is needed because schools are often times ineffective at remediating learning deficiencies early in a child's education".

Although grade repetition has long existed, research done shows evidence of this dating as far back as 1969, educators still have conflicting views of its advantages or

unfavourable effects. Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis (2004 as cited in Neff, 2011, p. 10-11) discovered that it is possible to find teachers at all levels within the school system who are pro-retention and see it as an "acceptable practice". The Global Education Digest (2012, p. 18) discussed the fact that repetition is "often considered to be a good solution if learning objectives for that grade level are not achieved". However one of the leading scholars advocating for the removal of grade repetition Shane Jimerson believes that grade repetition provides only, temporary gains, has a negative impact on achievement and adjustment and has negative long term effects, including social, emotional and behavioural problems, failure to complete high school, and consequences during adulthood. (Jimerson, 2001, Jimerson and Ferguson, 2007, Jimerson, Anderson and Whipple, 2002, Jimerson, 1999 as cited in Jimerson, 2012)

In 2010, 32.2 million pupils repeated a grade in primary education globally, this compared to 34.7 million in 2000 (Global Educational Digest, 2012, p. 19) and while this statistical evidence shows a decrease by 7% the absence of internationally agreed upon standards and grounded policies means that repetition continues to occur within educational institutions.

Evidence coming out of the United Nations show that Latin America and the Caribbean region is home to 17% of the global population of primary repeaters. However between 2000 and 2010 the percentage has fallen by 36% (Global Educational Digest, 2012,p. 20). In Trinidad and Tobago the practice continues to exist but documentation is sorely lacking. The Annual Statistical Digest (2009-2010) which provides the most recent statistics to date, showed evidence that grade repetition had varied between 2004 and 2009. (Appendix A). The OAS Hemispheric ECCE Team Report analyzed factors which contribute to repetition and school failure in this country (Appendix B) these included, home and family issues, learning environment, teacher quality, resources, curriculum delivery and of course students.

At the Achieving Primary School grade repetition is widely practiced from Infant Level One through to STD 3, very few children are recommended to repeat STD 4 because there is a practice of looping children for the pre-Secondary Entrance Assessment and there is a school policy regarding repeaters in STD 5. The numbers vary throughout the classes but there's an average of five repeaters per grade level per academic year.

Although I had engaged with repeaters during my initial years as an assistant teacher it was only on return to the classroom after completion of my Bachelors in Education that I began reflecting on the practice. During the second academic year at Achieving, I realized that a percentage of the children who were struggling in the class had had a history of repetition in earlier grades. It made me question the efficiency of the strategy. Why were these children who had spent an extra year at a grade level in an effort to remedy academic deficiencies still struggling with basic concepts? I wondered if these weren't addressed during the repeat year? My observations then made me realize that very little is done pedagogically to meet the specific needs of these underperforming students. Teachers were taking for granted that they were repeating the year due to maladies in their abilities, as determined by the previous year's teacher. The practice at the school, which has multiple classes in the same grade level is to have a child repeat with a different teacher even if the teacher who recommended the repetition remains at the grade level. In spite of recommendations being made at the end of the academic year, teachers were only made aware of the repeaters at the beginning of the academic year, this gives them very little time to plan and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of these struggling learners fully at the beginning of the year. Additional issues exist such as population and class sizes, teachers many times have little or no background knowledge of a student until he or she comes

to their class and existing anecdotal records may also not reveal fully the extent of the need for teachers to remediate or meet the needs of those who are repeating.

In discussions with colleagues it became apparent that the Ministry Of Education's stance on grade repetition is learner readiness and while recommendations are teacher made, administrators have the final say in the matter. Informal discussions also gave rise to the fact that teachers think spending another year repeating the grade level will benefit learners, who, while being capable of doing the work are lazy and submit shoddy work. Additionally, teachers recommend students who scores under 30% in consecutive terms through the academic year. Observations showed however that some of these pupils while making under the 30% weren't in fact struggling learner but rather were impacted by other factors such as school attendance and motivation. In such cases the recommendation for repetition proves redundant since the underlying issues for this pupil are not addressed. Another thrust behind the recommendations are the fact that pupils will be motivated to improve if they see their friends moving up and leaving them behind. This justification proves to be inappropriate especially because, "teachers are not trained or even expected to do anything different with either individual grade repeaters or the class as a whole" (Brophy, 2006, p. 27) and as such, teachers, "literally repeat the same lessons and activities they experiences the previous year" (Karweit, 1999, as cited in Brophy, 2006, p. 17).

Although the research shows that teachers are the primary initiators of the strategy there is little evidence of their overall feelings in relation to the issue. Troncin (2006 as cited in Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 21-22) indicated that French teachers have a positive view of the strategy, they see it as a "preventative measure helping children to succeed later on." Crahay (2003 as cited in Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 22) indicated that Belgian and Genevan teachers shared differing

views on the issue. Some felt it gave children a "chance to mature and be better prepared for their future schooling". While others thought it was a waste to have the weaker pupils repeat the "exact same curriculum". Ndaruhutse (2008, p. 22) gleaned through talks with teachers in some African countries on the strategy, that, "most view it favourably and as an essential tool for weaker children to be given a second chance to improve their knowledge and be more prepared for the higher levels of schooling". Discussions with colleagues and negligible evidence on Caribbean or local teachers views regarding grade repetition was the impetus behind this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The phenomena of grade repetition is an established practice in educational institutions for addressing academic underachievement in students. However it is still not fully understood what teachers' beliefs are regarding the issue. In addition, there are disparities regarding the way teachers treat with repeaters in the classroom or what they feel about the practice. As the phenomena continues to be utilized at the Achieving Primary School the researcher wanted to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' feelings regarding grade repetition and the impact of the strategy on repeaters and other children in their class and the success or failure of this strategy at the school.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study seeks to gain insight into the experiences teachers' have with respect to the issue of grade repetition as a strategy for correcting low academic performance. There is little research on the success of the strategy locally and how teachers manage instruction for these repeating students in the regular classes. Hence studies such as this one would add to the existing literature looking at teachers' perception to a policy that is utilized in our schools. Therefore this study aims to give teachers an opportunity to air their concerns as

well as determine whether they could identify alternative strategies to meet the needs of the underperforming student in their classrooms.

1.4 Research Questions

Grand tour question.

What are teachers' perceptions of grade repetition as an intervention strategy for correcting low academic achievement?

Sub questions.

1. What are the impacts of grade repetition, as perceived by teachers who practiced the intervention strategy?
2. From a teachers' perspective, does grade repetition lead to improvement in student performance?
3. What are some of the instructional strategies used by teachers to assist pupils who are repeating the academic year?

1.5 Definition of terms

Differentiated instruction.	Varying teaching to optimize the learning experience for all learners.
Looping.	The practice of having a teacher stay with a class of children for two or more grade levels. (Johnson and Rudolph, n.d.)
Low academic performance	Performance where the examinee falls below an expected standard (set by the school, district or national). (Asikhia 2010).
Repeater	A pupil who is not promoted to the next grade or does not complete an educational programme and who

remains in the same grade the following school year.

Repetition or retention.

The practice of making children who have not mastered the curriculum and thus do not reach certain academic standards repeat the year while their peers are promoted to the next year. (Ndaruhutse et al, CfBT 2008)

Social or automatic promotion.

The act of allowing these same children to continue to the next year of study with the rest of their peer group despite not having met the minimum required standards. (Ndaruhutse et al, CfBT 2008)

1.6 Significance of the Study

There is a dearth of local evidence to support or refute the effectiveness of grade repetition as a corrective strategy for low academic performance. The researcher hopes that the information gathered in this study will enhance the meagerness of the local literature on the topic. In addition, one hopes it will assist educators in keenly analyzing pedagogical practices so that they can meet the needs of all students in their classes, especially those who are underperforming as well as help them consider alternative strategies to grade repetition.

1.7 Organization of the paper

This paper is arranged in the subsequent chapters as follows: chapter two gives evaluates and synthesizes existing literature on the subject of grade repetition and teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding such. Chapter three comprehensively describes the methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. Analysis of the data and presentation of the findings were given in chapter four. Summarization of the findings, discussion and pertinent recommendations are given in chapter five.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Perusal of the literature provides a foundation which serves to guide the entire process of the research. The literature review must be conducted systematically and critically so that sufficient information to support one's topic may be obtained. The literature was explored extensively and material was found to satisfy three sub-headings. Firstly the researcher looked at the issue of grade retention or repetition, secondly, literature was explored on teachers' beliefs and perceptions and finally summarized what educators suggest as alternatives to the phenomenon.

2.1 Facets of grade repetition/retention

The practice of grade retention and repetition continues to be a highly debatable and controversial one with varying arguments both in favor and against the measure. Research shows that the use of the strategy has been based on the influences guiding the educational system in particular countries. The CFBT 2008 report compiled by Ndaruhutse, Brannelly, Latham and Penson stated that "repetition is a practice influenced strongly by culture and linguistics." (p.9). UNESCO's Global Education Digest 2012 which specifically focused on the issue of grade repetition and early school leaving spoke of the fact that "policies concerning grade repetition are often linked to historical traditions in the development of education systems and their colonial legacy." (p. 17).

Throughout the literature the words repetition and retention are used interchangeably in reference to the same corrective strategy. Ndaruhuste et al (2008) defined

repetition or retention "as the practice of making children who have not mastered the curriculum and this do not reach certain academic standards repeat the year while their peers are promoted to the next year." (p.9). Furthermore, grade retention is the practice of holding back students in the same grade for an extra year if they fail to achieve promotion requirements, either in the form of a performance measure or in the form of minimum attendance, is used in many developing and in some developed countries. (Koppensteiner, 2011, p.2). It is clear by these definitions that grade repetition is a practice that is established to remedy poor academic performance. The United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census stated that, 'retaining children at grade level is an intervention strategy that has been steadily increasing throughout the last three decades.' (Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson and Dalton, 2002, p. 51 as cited in Rand 2013).

The scope of grade repetition. The scope and implications of grade repetition are far reaching and not limited to specific countries. Some of the areas which concerns arose continuously in the literature are the economic, social, psychological and pedagogical dimensions of the phenomena. Economists who analyze the educational system believe that grade repetition not only depletes valuable assets which could be utilized in other areas of the educational sphere but also places a strain on the allocated funds which were set aside for a particular year. In the United States the additional year of schooling is estimated to cost taxpayers over 18 billion dollars annually. (Xia and Glennie, 2005 cited in Rand, p. 3). Brophy (2006) states:

"From a societal economic perspective, schooling is most efficient if every student moves up a grade every year. Each student who repeats has the economic effect of adding a new student (at that grade and subsequent grades). This

translates into larger class sizes and the need for additional desks and supplies. If many students repeat each year, the school system will need more teachers and classrooms. Repetition also represents wastage of resources. The society provides schools, teachers, and other resources presumed sufficient to enable all students to make expected advances in achievement. Failures to do so suggest that these resources were insufficient or that some students failed to take advantage of the opportunities provided." (p. 3)

Psychologists believe that having students repeat a grade affects their self esteem and self concept leading to them performing even worse than they were before. While from a social perspective, students who were made to repeat a year were more likely to drop out of school later on. (Brophy, 2006, CfBT, 2008, David, 2008, PISA report, 2009, Jimerson, 2012, NASP, n.d). The research done also notes that many times teachers who get students in the following year are not made aware of the struggles the student may have and as such cannot treat appropriately with the deficiencies therefore the child will not make notable improvements at the end of the second year in any particular grade. (Brophy, 2006, PISA report, 2009, Jimerson, 2012).

Selection of repeaters. The process of grade repetition itself seems to have no grounded principles which guide the way educators recommend the strategy. However the literature was able to shed some light on the way educators go about the process. UNESCO in its 2012 Global Educational Digest stated that;

"Repetition is often considered to be a good solution if learning objectives for that grade level are not achieved. Usually, repeaters are identified at the classroom level. The decision to repeat can be taken unilaterally by the classroom teacher-as

in the case of many developing countries-or after consultation with student's parents..." (p. 18)

Furthermore the Digest claimed that the lack of national norms and regulations has led many experts to argue that these decisions are based on vague and theoretical learning standards. (UNESCO/IIEP, 1997, Crahay, 2007 cited in G.E.D.) Additionally, recommendations of students for repetition are made based on the class teacher's evaluation of the student. This is often not done against standardized tests and as such, a child who may be promoted by one teacher can be held back by another. (p. 18) In CfBT's study, Ndaruhutse et al brought forward the findings of Bernard et. al. (2005, p. 35) which pointed out the fact that in many countries of the world teachers are the ones who select repeaters but this is done in relation to the class level and not against some objective external standard for all students. (p. 17). The study by Bernard et. al.(2005, p. 45) also gave rise to an educational malpractice in relation to grade repetition where teachers made the decision to repeat a child based on their ranking in the class. This means that weaker children in a very bright class were more likely forced to repeat despite achieving a satisfactory level in the standard evaluation tests. (p. 18)

Arguments for and against repetition. Ndaruhutse et al (2008) recognized that proponents of the strategy view it as being important and having advantages which include the opportunities that come from being allowed to go over the material so as to come up to the necessary level. The additional year gives immature or younger students the time to feel more secured and settled. Finally it is believed that weaker students add to the homogeneity of the class, thus benefitting the teacher and the other students in the class. (p. 12) Further arguments in favor of the strategy believe that if a student is made to repeat they will be motivated to work

harder in school (WEAC, 2012) Robertson (n.d.) also asserts that some teachers and parents believe another year in the same grade would allow some children to become more mature.

Contrastingly the same study done by Ndaruhutse et al (2008) listed arguments against the use of repetition acknowledging that students view themselves as failures. Furthermore, repetition of the same material usually with the same teacher can cause a decrease in motivation and repetition does not address the reasons behind low performance which means it may not improve the performance of children significantly. (p. 12). The National Association of School Psychologists (U.S) as cited in Robertson (n.d.) believes that many children who repeat do not 'catch up'. In addition, while these children may show signs of doing better at first they tend to fall behind again in later grades. This argument is supplemented by Brophy (2006) who stated that retained students tend to fall further and further behind promoted peers who had very similar achievement profiles in the year prior to grade repetition. (p. 15)

Troncin (2006 cited in Ndaruhutse) argues that repetition is the easiest and most visible response to the learning difficulties of certain pupils. However use of this strategy can prove to be counterproductive for the pupil mostly due to the fact that they already have difficulties learning which are compounded when they repeat the year in the same way without any supplementary support to assist the pupil. (p. 13) A study done by Bonvin, Bless and Schuepbach (2008, p. 10) revealed that the decision for grade retention is strongly determined – when pupils' academic achievement is controlled for – by the attitudes and assessments of the teacher. This means that one cannot ignore the fact that the decision for grade retention is based for a good part on factors that are distant from the pupil's actual achievement or potential, that may induce bias, and lead to a certain randomness in the practice of grade retention.

Policies guiding practice. Historically grade retention was intended to improve school performance by allowing underachieving students more time to develop adequate academic skills (Reynolds, 1992 cited in Owings and Kaplan p. 10). However in the United States it did not take long for researchers to realize that negative effects of retention could outweigh the positive intent. (Owings and Kaplan p. 10) Therefore nationwide legislature began to impact the use of the strategy. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was birthed by the Clinton administration but was supported by George E. Bush and passed in 2001. This policy requires that individual states use assessments that align with academic standards set by each state's Department of Education to measure the achievement of all students in each grade level. U.S. Department of Education, 2006, cited in Rand, 2013, p. 3). Schools were now under pressure to ensure their academic achievements were growing. (NCLB, 2001, cited in Rand). However not only were they now under pressure to succeed, there was greater emphasis on ensuring all pupils met the basic competencies. (Rand, 2013, p. 3) 'Reading, writing, and other academic standards have emerged as indicators of whether students are proficient and should be promoted to the next grade level.' (Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nicherson and Kundert, 2006, p. 86 cited in Rand). Rand postulated that these 'high stakes testing' was utilized by districts to measure performance by schools. 'States increasingly use performance on these tests to evaluate schools and to reach decisions about promotion of children to the next grade level.' (Wu et al, 2008, cited in Rand). However this form of evaluation lessened the occurrences of social promotion and augmented the incidences of grade retention. (Gootman, 2005, Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton and Allensworth, 1999, Roderick and Nagaoka, 2005 cited in Rand).

Grade repetition in the age of Education for All. While the United States implements a policy which has negative consequences and regressive connotations, many other countries

move towards other forms of policy reform which once implemented appropriately should have positive consequences for the overall education sector. One such policy move is that of Education for All. This initiative came out of The Dakar Framework for Action which is based on the most extensive evaluation of education ever undertaken, the Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment. (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, p.3). The impetus behind this policy is the attainment of certain global educational goals. According to the World Declaration on Education for All, Article 1, Paragraph 1;

"Basic learning needs...comprise both essential learning tools...and the basic learning content...required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed and to continue learning." (p. 15)

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has aligned itself to the EFA, in light of this the Education Policy Paper (1993-2003) Philosophy of Education has identified certain beliefs, among them the fact that;

"Students vary in natural ability and that schools therefore should provide, for all students, programmes which are adapted to varying abilities, and which provide opportunities to develop differing personal and socially useful talents." (p. xii)

In addition;

"Learning is cumulative and that every stage in the educational process is as important and critical for the learner's development as what has gone before it and what is to come." (p. xii)

In its OAS Hemispheric ECCE Team Report (2004) the Ministry of Education explored Early Childhood Education which they see as the solution to grade repetition, over-aged students, dropouts and low educational achievement and as such have resolved to place emphasis on these areas. The Ministry's guiding philosophy believes that all children have the inherent right to become all they are capable of becoming regardless of ethnic group, religion, socio-economic status or gender. (2004).

It is their belief that targeting the problem from the early childhood levels would help reverse the failures which presently exist in the system. Early childhood has been shown to enhance school readiness, prevents stunted cognitive development, improve primary school performance, lower repetition and dropout rates. (Young, 1996 cited in OAS Report). The Ministry's plan of action aims at providing not only equity but the quality of early childhood development via a seamless educational system with special emphasis on remedying factors they have identified which promote school failure. (2004)

2.2 Teachers' beliefs about repetition

According to Wynn (2010)

"Grade retention is perhaps the most powerful message a teacher can send to a student to inform that he or she is not achieving and is not as capable as his or her peers. Teachers, as well as parents, may not realize the tremendous power they have when it comes to the practice of grade retention. Teachers and parents may make the decision to retain students without realizing what research has documented about grade retention. Teachers need to know the effects of grade retention on the students who might face this situation." (p. 62-63)

Although there has been considerable research about the effects of retention on student outcomes, research about why educators recommend it for students is underdeveloped. (Bonvin et al., 2008) Range, Holt, Pijanowski and Young in their study asked a very poignant question, "Despite the one-sided nature of research that argues grade retention is not effective, why do educators continue to perceive grade retention as beneficial?" (2012, p. 3) Range et al highlight some crucial pieces of literature in their study, they discovered that, 'retention is typically viewed as a school-level decision made by principals and teachers' (Bali, Anagnostopoulos and Roberts, cited in Range et al, 2005). They added too that 'past inquires have found teachers' beliefs about retention are influenced by peers rather than by research' (Bonvin et al, 2008, Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis, 2004), this Range et al (2012) believed caused teachers to recommend retention for students who have similar characteristics such as being male, minority and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. (Burkam et al, 2007, Cannon and Lipscomp, 2011 cited in Range et al). Based on previous studies done, which yielded that the most frequent reasons teachers gave for recommending retention included academic achievement and lack of maturity. (Range et al, 2011b, Tomchin and Impara, 1992 cited in Range et al). Building on this they went on to report that Beswick et al (2008 cited by Range et al) discovered that educators perceive immaturity as the cause of early learning problems and believe students simply need more time to develop.

In an earlier study conducted by Range, Yonke and Young (2011) which explored pre-service teacher beliefs about retention they highlighted that as researchers attempt to study retention, they have stressed the importance of teacher beliefs concerning at-risk students and retention. (Cadigan, Entwisle, Alexander and Pallas, 1988 cited by Range et al). Their own exploration of the literature found that teachers, especially primary grade teachers believe retention is a viable option for students who are struggling. (Roberts, 2007, Tomchin and Impara,

1992, Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis, 2004 cited in Range et al.) because primary grade teachers, 'have limited knowledge of the long-term student trajectories after retention' (Xia and Lennie, 2005c, p.3 cited by Range et al). They grounded the need to study classroom teachers' beliefs because the majority of retention recommendations are initiated by classroom teachers. (Bonvin, Bless and Schuepbach, 2008, Cannon and Lipscomb, 2011 cited in Range et al. p. 78)

Wynn (2010) presented findings from a study conducted among Middle School teachers in a Florida school district and tried to glean their perceptions about the practice. Survey responses of 326 teachers in five selected middle schools in Florida and ten interviews clearly indicated that teachers believe children should be retained. A majority, nearly 83% disagreed that students should not be retained. The study went on to reveal that although suspension and attendance have bearing, over 76% of teachers agreed that poor academics were the major reason for retention.

Over 65% of teacher indicated that grade retention allows students who are behind academically to-catch up with peers. In addition, nearly 39% disagreed that retention is harmful to a child's self concept/self image. However, nearly 80% of teachers agreed grade retention affects a child's self esteem.

Pettay (2010) made a notable observation based on existing literature. She cited Kagan (1992) who put forward the notion that:

"teachers seldom change their attitudes based on research they have read; however they are more prone to change their attitude as a result of advice from other teachers or from their own personal experiences."

Pettay acknowledges that while that portion of literature is now more than twenty years old, she found that there still has been little research assessing why some teachers continue to disregard the research regarding grade retention. (p.2)

At the end of the study Pettay (2010) gathered evidence which presented a conflict of sorts, firstly she stated that her results revealed that the teachers attitudes about grade retention were significantly changed when they were presented with a research-based article entitled 'Grade Retention and Promotion' (Jimerson et al, 2006) which looks at the negative effects of grade retention. However in spite of this there was a disconnect between the statistical results and the responses that the teachers gave. While the quantitative data showed a change in attitude, her qualitative findings indicated that there wasn't an actual change in attitudes about retention and even when presented with scientific evidence, teachers didn't change their opinions about the practice. (p. 12)

Halverstadt (2009) in her research found that teacher either agreed or strongly agreed that a student's maturity level, academic performance and date of birth are factors they used to determine whether a student should be retained. They also strongly agreed that a student's maturity level and academic performance are outcomes associated with grade retention. Additionally participants in this study agreed that differentiated instruction is an effective alternative to grade retention. Halverstadt's study also revealed the existence of a performance measurement tool, known as Light's Retention Scale (Light, 1986) which was used by school professionals in determining whether students would benefit from retention. However studies into the accuracy of this instrument proved that it isn't a reliable or valid tool. Halverstadt cited Westbury (1994) who concluded that there is no way to predict reliably which students will

indeed benefit from retention and that educators should seek ways to help students improve performance such as remedial instruction. (p. 29).

Another study undertaken by Range (2009) presented the following statistical data; 58.2% primary grade teachers reported that the most important factor when considering a students for retention was, 'School Academic Performance'. 20.4% rated 'Ability' second and 16.3% gave 'Emotional maturity' as a third reason. (p. 109). In addition female teachers and principals agreed more strongly than males that 'Retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next grade level. (p. 114). Furthermore the study revealed that respondents between the ages of 50-59 strongly agreed with retention as an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next grade level, however they strongly disagreed with the statement, students should never be retained. (p. 117). Finally respondents who were holders of a Bachelors degree strongly with grade retention as an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure. While Doctorate degree holders strongly disagreed that students should never be retained. (p.120).

Renaud (2013) believes that teachers are either not informed of the research regarding grade retention or choosing to go by their own professional opinions. (p.2). She went on to cite the work of Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis (2004) who found that many teachers are still choosing to retain students, because it is their only alternative. (p.1). Furthermore, Renaud (2013) claims that teacher attitude about retention do not necessarily reflect the research. She found that in a study of teacher attitudes about retention, it was concluded that most teachers believe grade retention between kindergarten and fourth grade is beneficial for the child. (Witmer et al, 2004 cited in Renaud). The same study drew the conclusion that there is a need to educate the people who are making decisions about retention, about the research and the implications for students.

(Witmer et al, 2004 cited in Renaud p. 3). 'Overall, teachers described their knowledge of retention research as limited. The majority attributed their knowledge to personal experiences with retained students'. (Witmer et al, 2004 cited in Renaud).

Ede (2006) presupposed that there exists a dichotomy between research findings and pedagogical practice on the issue of grade retention. (p.12). Teachers continue to retain students thereby contradicting the research findings regarding its effectiveness. (p.12). A number of factors come into play here, including the fact that teachers may not believe what the research says, are unaware of current research or believe that retention is a sound pedagogical practice. (p. 12). Based on her experiences teachers viewed retention as the only alternative when faced with a student's academic failure, additionally because many teachers only see the initial positive effect, they construct a belief that retention is a positive and desirable intervention strategy for correcting current and preventing future academic failure. (Ede, 2006, p.13).

The research is not only confined to American schools, Bonvin (2003 cited in Ede, p. 19) stated even second grade teachers in Fribourg, Switzerland who valued achievement as a decisive criterion were also found to utilize retention if academic objectives were not met. Further to this Troncin (2006 cited in Ndaruhutse) undertook research which showed that there was a generally positive attitude to repetition among French teacher, with the view that it is a preventative measure helping children to succeed later on. This research found that teachers believe repetition has a positive impact on learning outcomes, that the negative psychological impacts on children are limited and that there are not really any alternatives. (p.21). In addition Ndaruhutse also cited the work of Crahay (2003) who researched the views of Belgian and Genevan teachers and found that they had divided views on the entire phenomenon. Some teachers felt that repetition gives some children the chance to mature and be better prepared for

their future schooling; others felt that making weak children repeat exactly the same curriculum seems wasteful. The teachers didn't generally believe that repetition reflected a failure in their teaching or was an unjust practice. Additionally the majority of primary teachers didn't think that repetition has a negative impact on children or on their confidence but rather they saw it as a way of providing remedial support to weaker students. (p. 22). African teachers who were spoken to regarding the strategy had favourable views and saw it as an essential tool to assist weaker children by giving them a chance to improve their knowledge and be more prepared for the higher levels of schooling. (Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 22). It was revealed from a study done by CONFEMEN (2003c, cited in Ndaruhutse) that nearly 80% of Senegalese teacher thought repetition was an 'efficient' measure and 18% thought it was 'extremely efficient'. Only 2% believed that repetition was 'totally inefficient. (p. 22).

2.3 Alternatives to grade repetition

Social promotion. This is believed to be the practice of allowing pupils to advance to the next grade even in the absence of mastery of content in the current grade level. Research showed it has been seen as an alternative to retention because it appealed to the nurturing side of most educators. Additionally, moving children along socially did not appear to do them any academic harm nor did it place them at risk of dropping out of school. (Owings and Kaplan, 2001, p. 16). The OECD's publication *Equity and Quality in Education* postulated that repetition can be prevented via means of early support and comprehensive assessment. Furthermore they found where gaps are exist in learning, automatic (social) promotion proves to be more effective than broadly using the former. (2012, p. 51). The argument exists however whether this practice is as detrimental as grade repetition, Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) presented the following;

"Research reveals that neither grade retention nor social promotion alone is an effective strategy for improving students' academic, behavioural and social and emotional success. Like so much in education, what is most effective is a targeted approach that addresses students' academic, social, and mental health issues and links specific evidence-based interventions to a student's individual needs."

(Algozzine, Ysseldyke and Elliot, 2002, Shinn and Walker, 2012 cited in Jimerson and Renshaw).

In light of this existing research one now has to ask the question, if not grade repetition or social promotion, what then? Hammer (2010, p. 24) indicated that there are intervention strategies existing which can assist students academically, socially and behaviourally. Teachers should assess students early in the school year, and provide appropriate and timely instructional interventions. Other intervention strategies also include positive parental involvement, individualized student educational programs, individualized tutoring to help students important, necessary skills, school-based mental health programs and behaviour and cognitive behaviour modification. (Ferguson, et al., 2001, Jimerson, Pletcher et al, 2006 cited in Hammer). David (2008) suggests before and after school programs or extra help during the day. The key to helping students however is early diagnosis and targeted intervention without which a struggling learner will not catch up no matter what strategy is used. (David, 2008).

Other classroom initiatives. Differentiating instruction is also seen as a viable option to assisting students as well as looping. With the former, teachers acknowledge that students learn at different rates and finds ways to match the differing learning styles which exist in the classroom by modifying instruction accordingly. (Halverstadt, 2009, p. 33). With the latter, pupils are placed with the same teacher for consecutive academic years on the premise that the

extra year with the teacher will allow the child to build a stronger relationship with the teacher and thereby address issues such as individual learning needs, help bring about an increase in self esteem, reduce behaviour problems and allows for more instruction time. (Kenny, 2007 cited in Halverstadt).

It is imperative therefore in light of all of this existing literature that this issue needs to be addressed from a classroom teacher's perspective since they are the ones who are responsible for implementing the practice and making the changes necessary to assist learners acquire academic proficiency.

2. 4 Summary of Literature

This exploration of the literature while not exhaustive highlighted studies, arguments, opinions and policies as regards to the phenomena of grade repetition. It looked at the reasons behind use of the strategy, ways in which repeaters were selected, reasons why the practice was advocated for and why it wasn't useful for remedying underachievement in students. In addition, it looked at teachers' beliefs concerning the phenomena and alternatives to the strategy which can be used in the classroom/school.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter delineates the type of study as well as the design method utilized. It provides details as well of the sampling procedures used and gives a profile of the participants. Additionally it speaks to the data collection strategies and measures taken to ensure the highest level of transparency following ethical guidelines. It also explores how the researcher set out analyzing the data. Finally the chapter outlines the researcher's experience whilst conducting the study-the challenges as well as the limitations and delimitations of the study.

3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative, approach. According to Halcom's Education Laws (Patton, 1990) qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities- the capacity to learn from others. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. As such researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Patton (2002) defined qualitative research as attempting to understand the unique interactions in a particular situation. They postulated that researchers aren't concerned with understanding for the purpose of making predictions but are instead concerned with gathering an in-depth perspective of the characteristics of the experience and the meanings the participants make, in the moment.

Additionally, qualitative research as a whole can be characteristically described as inductive in nature. Researchers "do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove

hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together." Bodgan et al (1998). Based on these assertions the qualitative approach would be best suited for engaging the participants so that the researcher can gain a better understanding into their perceptions on the use of grade repetition as an intervention strategy for low academic performance. Additionally, this form would allow the researcher to set herself apart from the participants so as to gather; "understanding of the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009, p.13).

This research method aligns itself perfectly to the study because the practice of having children repeat a grade level has been happening for a number of years in Trinidad and Tobago with teachers engaging in a practice which simply follows local educational traditions and the qualitative paradigm would help the researcher delve deeper into their realities in order to better help her understand the phenomena

3.2 Justification for research design

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p181) postulated quite simply that case studies can explore occurrences in a way that would be challenging to examine via means of numerical methods. Furthermore they saw case studies as being able to provide:

"a unique example of real people in real situation, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles." (p.181)

Merriam (2009, p. 40) states that "a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system." Additionally, she believes that, "as a product of an investigation, as case study

is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit.

She supports the argument put forward by Cohen et al by stating that a researcher's decision to

"focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that the design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing." (p. 42)

Yin (2014) delineates the definition of case study as a research method into two parts which he believes encompasses its scope and features. He believes;

"A case study is an empirical inquiry that; investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. (p. 16) Additionally, a case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis." (p. 17)

Because of its pluralistic, heuristic and descriptive nature (Merriam, 2009, p. 43-44) a case study approach was ideal for this study since it lends itself to assisting the researcher in gaining greater insight into the phenomenon of grade repetition. Additionally it provides for generating a "rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study." (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Finally "case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience or confirm what is known." (Merriam, 2014, p. 44). Merriam cites Stake's (2007, p.3) assertions to corroborate her

description of case studies. He believed that the illumination which comes out of case studies comes to us via a process called, "naturalistic generalization" meaning that it provides vicarious instances and episodes that merge with existing icons of experience." Simply put, case studies create a medium where the researcher is able to perceive things through the eyes of the participants and use this to either reinforce or modify existing views. In this particular setting it means that while the researcher herself is a teacher with her own experiences on having students repeat an academic year, the case study method will allow her to gain insight into what different colleagues hold as their own perspectives on the phenomena of grade repetition.

3.3 Sampling strategies and selection of Participants

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014, p. 32) speak of different types of sampling strategies. For the purpose of this research a "strategic and purposive" (p. 32) style was utilized. Participants were also selected based on convenience (Miles et. al 2014 p. 32) as they are teachers who work with the researcher thereby facilitating the opportunity to question and clarify on site and as needed. There are presently 26 members on staff, and all have had at least one pupil repeat a year with them over the course of their teaching career. Approximately half of the staff are holders of the Bachelors in Education, while those that aren't have more than twenty years of service and teaching experience. The researcher chose to go for a mix of both experience and qualification as well as gain insight from a male's perspective. All of the teachers chosen have taught repeaters and have also recommended students for repetition. The fusion of these factors will assist the researcher greatly in answering the research questions. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, participants were assigned letter pseudonyms.

Teacher X

Teacher X is a female teacher with ten years in the service, she is currently the teacher of a 2nd Year Infants class. She is the holder of a Bachelor of Education (Primary Specialization) and has been teaching 1st and 2nd Year Infants for the last four years. Presently she has two children repeating in her class and recommended one child for repetition last academic year.

Teacher Y

Teacher Y is a male teacher with ten years service as well. At present he is a teacher in the STD 4 department, however within the last four years, he has taught both STD's 1 and 2. He is also the holder of a Bachelor of Education (Primary Specialization). Last academic year he recommended one child to repeat and this academic year he has one repeater in his class.

Teacher Z

Although Teacher Z is only the holder of a Teachers' Diploma she has over forty years of teaching experience. She has had a myriad of experiences with repeaters over the years and at this time has two in her class. At the end of the last academic year, she recommended five pupils to repeat.

3.4 Data Collection procedures

Interviews are believed to be “the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (Bateson, 1990, as cited in Merriam (1998), p. 72). Cannell and Kahn (1968, p. 527) as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison's book- *Research Methods in Education* elucidates that interviews are "a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him [sic] on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation." (2000, p. 269). They went on to state of interviews that, "it involves gathering the

data through direct verbal interaction between individuals." Based on these assumptions the researcher believes this method of data collection will yield "rich, thick" data since it will allow the participants to share their own beliefs on the issue of grade repetition. Creswell (2007, p 132) advises that one should choose the interview type which would be able to "net the most useful information to answer the research questions." As such, face to face individual semi-structured interviews were chosen. Interview questions were formulated and were cross referenced with the sub questions so that the interview's purpose would yield information which would answer the research question. These interviews adhered to strict ethical guidelines which will be discussed in the subsequent section

3.5 Ethical considerations

Zimbardo (1984) postulated that "Ethics embody individual and communal codes of conduct based upon adherence to a set of principles which may be explicit and codified or implicit, and which may be abstract and impersonal or concrete and personal." (cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p.58). Every qualitative research text perused underscored the importance of observing certain guiding ethical principles in the research process. Firstly, documentation was sent to the Ministry of Education requesting permission for the research to be conducted at the school. The researcher also acquired written consent from the Administration at the school where the study was undertaken. (Appendix C)

Written informed consent was gained from the participants. (Appendix D) The researcher followed the guidelines of a semi structured interview protocol (Appendix E) and participants were made comfortable at the beginning of the sessions which lasted between 30 to 35minutes. The participants were made aware of the nature of the research and informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time. They agreed to have the interviews audio taped

and the researcher also made field notes throughout the process. The interviewer gained permission as well to use quotations from the sessions. The interviewer concluded each session by thanking the person for their cooperation in the study adding that they might be called upon in future to clarify irregularities which may crop up during the transcription process. Participants were very forthcoming with responses and requested a copy of the research paper in its entirety at the end of the study for their edification. The interviewer emphatically assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity not only for themselves but also for the school being used and as such pseudonyms were assigned accordingly.

3. 6 Validity

Creswell (2007) espoused use of measures which will give one's research trustworthiness. He views "validation as a distinct strength of qualitative research..." (p. 207). He recommends researchers use "validation strategies" (p. 207) to "document the "accuracy" of their studies." (p. 207).

For the purpose of this study the researcher used measures of triangulation by corroborating the interview transcriptions with detailed field notes. In addition, member checking was utilized after the transcriptions were completed to regularize any discrepancies between what was said and what was interpreted. Stake (1995) believes, "participants should "play a major role directing as well as acting in case study" research. (cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 208-209). Finally the researcher sought the assistance of colleagues outside of the research experience and also peers at the University to give an unbiased opinion of the process as a final mode of member checking.

3.7 Data Analysis procedures

According to Merriam (2009, p.175) "data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data." This analysis requires "consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read-it is the process of making meaning." As data was collected the analysis began as well. The researcher followed Creswell's (2007) delineation of the "data analysis spiral" (p. 150). The interviews were transcribed and organized. (Appendix F) Participants were allowed to read the transcripts so as to correct any erroneous representation of the discourse between themselves and the interviewer. This data was then read and reread as the researcher tried to make meaning of it in its entirety.

Following this the researcher then began "describing, classifying and interpreting" (p. 151) the data. The researcher then began coding the data inductively in an effort to gather "the most meaningful material" (Miles et al 2014, p. 73) out of the data. This process saw the generation of descriptive, in vivo and values codes. The data analysis process also utilized the Constant Comparative Method (Glasser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Merriam, 2009) as the researcher continuously reviewed each interview transcript and compared the generated codes with each other. Open codes identified in individual interviews were then translated into axial codes (Cornin and Strauss, 2007 cited in Merriam, 2009).

Although not an exhaustive process, after revising and re-examining the transcripts numerous times and being satisfied with the codes generated, the researcher elucidated from these various categories or themes. During this entire process the researcher maintained a cyclical approach returning time and again to the research questions -acknowledging the presuppositions of Merriam (2009) that data analysis and data collection are concurrent processes. (Appendix G) This was done therefore so as to ensure the data being collected gave

rise to evidence which supported the research questions and if there was any need to refine or revise accordingly.

3.8 Researcher's experience

Conceptualization of this study began in July last year when we were requested to submit our research topics to the University so that we would be assigned lecturers. During the academic year I had had a child in the class at STD 3 who had repeated STD 2, however I noted significant challenges such as inability to read or complete basics which remediation during the repeated year was supposed to have rectified. As such I initially set out to research whether there was a relationship between repeating and the impact it had on a child's academic performance after the repeated year.

After consultation with my academic advisor in November 2013, we agreed that this was an interesting topic to pursue since there was little evidence of the benefits, if any which arise out of having children repeat classes at the primary level. We agreed too to conduct the study according to the qualitative research paradigm. During the Christmas break I spent time reading voraciously up on academic writing, qualitative research and also on the topic in preparation for creating a paper which would not only be theoretically sound but would be laid out in an acceptable academic format.

In January, I encountered my first hurdle, refining the research topic for the purpose of the paper and proposal. After much internal wrangling, countless hours spent at the library and discussions with peers in Youth Guidance, I determined that the study would look at the impacts grade repetition has on the self esteem of the child who was made to repeat. Further discussions with other peers and colleagues revealed that this approach might not yield the results I wanted since children at the primary school level are not very reflective or introspective and if asked

how they felt about anything I may get responses of 'good' and 'bad' only. At this juncture I readjusted focus and determined since teachers play a crucial role in the entire process that I would try to gain insight into the way they felt about the practice.

Other changes occurred along the way, the research design went from a case study to a phenomenological study before reverting to a case study for the ease which it affords novice researcher such as myself to present a paper. There were also challenges in determining a suitable time to meet with participants because of a myriad of personal and school based factors. In addition, after my research seminar one of the participants identified there stated that she would no longer be able to participate in the study, fortunately another colleague acceded to my request to participate in the study.

3.9 Limitations of the study

There are several existing constraints to this study. The Achieving Primary School is a hub of activity and therefore there are time constraints in meeting teachers to conduct the interviews. The study is confined to this school, which was chosen deliberately for convenience. However the school may not give an accurate reflection of the existing cultures in other schools in other educational districts, thereby hindering generalizations from the study. Furthermore, since the researcher works at the school and has a personal interaction with the interviewees, the interview process can give rise to the "Heisenberg effect" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.35) where interviewees can give responses they think the researcher wants to hear. Also, differing personalities of the teachers used would not only give rise to personal biases which may not necessarily mirror all the opinions of all their other colleagues.

3. 10 Delimitations of the study

This study for the sake of convenience is confined to three teachers from one denominational school in one educational district.

3.11 Summary of methodology

This chapter explored reasons why the researcher chose the qualitative paradigm with special focus on the case study design. It highlighted the way participants were chosen as well as methods which were used for data collection and analysis while showing steps the researcher took to ensure validity, upholding of ethical considerations and looked at her experience throughout the process as well as the limitations and delimitations of the study

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Introduction

Researchers have used numerous metaphors to describe the process of data analysis. It has been likened to a kaleidoscope as well as a jigsaw puzzle (Suter, 2012, p. 348) however no matter what comparisons are made at the heart of data analysis is the fact that the researcher must move inductively through the data that has been collected. The researcher arrived at themes via the process of coding, then condensing these codes and finally noted what stood out from the data in relation to the sub research questions.

The transcribed data procured from interviews with teachers, X, Y and Z, were read and reread numerous times so as to develop the codes and emerging themes. The researcher initially made jottings on a hard copy of each transcript; these codes were then entered into the word processing software. The interviews were then reviewed again and other notable points highlighted. It is the intention of the researcher in this chapter to evaluate the findings and synthesize them in a way so as to align them to the research questions.

4. 1 Presentation of findings

Research question 1: What are the impacts of grade repetition as perceived by teachers who practiced the intervention strategy?

From the information gathered the researcher found that the teachers had conflicting views on the entire process of grade repetition. Each of the participants had recommended the strategy in the past for struggling learner and they had also had experience teaching pupils who had been retained. This left them each with differing perspectives as to whether there were

obvious advantages or disadvantages to using grade repetition to remedy academic underachievement.

Table 4.1 highlights the theme Factors which teachers use to guide the practice of grade repetition.

Theme/Code	Definition of Theme/Code	Associated Participant's Responses
1. Readiness	Teachers feel that lack of readiness for the next level is an indicator that a child may need to spend the year repeating the level.	<p>Teacher X: Remedies, in most cases, a lack of readiness or maturity in students. It gives them the extra time to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills needed to move on to another level.</p> <p>Teacher Y: I look at the attendance records and age as well. These can show if the child's academic downfall isn't simply because of the child's inability but rather just a gap in their knowledge acquisition or an issue with their readiness for the level.</p> <p>Teacher Z: I don't think that it works for all children because of readiness to learn and attitude towards work.</p>
2. Learner differences	Teachers believe the strategy has to be used on a learner specific basis	Teacher X: I see them as students who need extra assistance/guidance and a boost of confidence to help them achieve their goals.

	<p>and diagnostic testing needs to be done.</p>	<p>These students have the ability to learn and master all the knowledge and skills but the obstacles they face cause them to struggle and all they need is a little extra help and guidance to do so.</p> <p>Teacher Y: I view repeaters in my class as individuals who are in need of special assistance to unlock their true potential.</p> <p>Each child is different and their individual problems with learning needs individual solutions.</p> <p>Teacher Z Some of the children have shown progress and this has encouraged me to monitor them often but others have the same attitude to the work and their lack of commitment remains as it was the first time around:</p>
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The theme of Effects on the repeater also emerged in response to research question 1.

Table 4.2 looks notable responses in relation to this.

Theme/Code	Definition of Theme/Code	Associated Participant's Responses
1. Self esteem/ social	Teachers considered	Teacher X: It is a practice that is

<p>issues</p>	<p>learners self esteem when recommending repetition and noted impacts to self esteem</p>	<p>seen as negative by the children involved because they feel a sense of inadequacy being left back and alone because they now have to make new friends. Their self esteem also takes a blow, especially if taunted by their friends who are going on to another grade.</p> <p>Teacher Y: I have noticed that students who have repeated often have a lower self esteem and develop social issues, especially if they have this mentality that this level they are repeating is beneath them. They also sometimes take advantage of the other students in the class because they feel since they are older they can exercise authority based on that fact.</p> <p>Teacher Z: Of course a child's self esteem is hindered because of this. But one has to take into</p>
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		<p>consideration the teacher and pupil's frustration if the child is promoted and goes to another teacher's class. And while it is important to consider the child's self concept sometimes it becomes necessary to repeat a child.</p>
<p>2. Frustration</p>	<p>Grade repetition and social promotion leads to frustrations on all levels (students, teachers, parents)</p>	<p>Teacher X: biggest frustration comes from parents who do not give their child extra assistance and support at home.</p> <p>Teacher Y: Students that repeat often have behavioural issues and show little motivation. Sometimes this affects the behaviour of the other children in the class as well.</p> <p>Teacher Z: I am not able to monitor these children properly because of the big class sizes at our school. Then there is the challenge of parents who aren't willing to cooperate with the teacher. Here as well, there is the challenge to get the</p>

		curriculum work covered in a certain time and as such there isn't a lot of time to go over work some children might not understand or do a lot of revision at school.
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Further probing in the data revealed a cornucopia of responses to the Research Question 2: From a teachers' perspective, does grade repetition lead to improvement in student performance?

Teachers indicated that even when students repeat if there is no change in their overall attitude towards learning and school, no impact will be made. Ms Z stated, "others have the same attitude to the work and their lack of commitment remains as it was the first time around."

Table 4.3 looks at the emerging themes and highlights the teachers opinions on the issues.

Theme/Code	Definition of Theme/Code	Associated Participant's Responses
1. Benefits of repetition/ Learner specific	Teachers explored ways in which the practice has worked.	Teacher X: (R1) All the students who repeated showed signs of academic improvements but not all to the same extent. For some, reading is improved. Others, it improved their communication and reasoning skills. (R2) I have seen students improve. They were able to move from one

		<p>level to another. The mastered to different extents, knowledge, skills and abilities they were unable to before. They were much more confident and self assured in themselves and their ability to perform tasks in the classroom.</p> <p>Teacher Y: (R1) may be positive for some students but not all. I believe that the majority of students that repeat do not benefit from it. Each child is different and their individual problems with learning needs individual solutions. Repeating is not a solution for all of the problems learner have.</p> <p>(R 2) Very little change but in some cases there has been positive change</p> <p>(R 3) Some students have shown improvements. I have *Emma now in STD 4, I taught this class in STD 1 and she was repeating with them at the time, now I have seen her having</p>
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		<p>greater competency in writing but otherwise there hasn't been much change. In the case of *Bruce who I taught in STD 1 last year, there were no improvements at all.</p> <p>Teacher Z: (R 1) Some children respond well to this as progress is seen in many areas if not all. On the other hand, other children show no improvement</p> <p>(R 2) Some of the pupils need this as they show that they are a little more mature and are now ready to do what they could not understand before. But some remain at the same level even with the additional year</p>
2. Support for the practice	Examining whether teachers would continue the practice in future.	<p>Teacher X: Yes, I definitely would. This because of the benefits I have seen. The pupils were able to reach where they should and they do have a greater sense of self and they have more self esteem.</p>

		<p>Teacher Y: I really wouldn't recommend it, because it makes no sense, well actually, if the issue is a learning disability then it makes no sense but if it's about readiness and I think the child would be able to get up to the level because of the additional year in the class, then yes I would. It would all be based on the individual child and the issue.</p> <p>Teacher Z: I would most definitely not recommend children to repeat again at this school. It doesn't make any sense, in our situation, we have no separations between classes, there isn't any time for individual work or to modify the curriculum to meet their needs, the child will just get lost, become frustrated and then frustrate the teacher</p>
3. Parental involvement	Teachers explored the impact of parents who show an	Teacher X: In my experience, if little support is given at home, the

	<p>interest in their children as opposed to those who don't and the effect on academic achievement.</p>	<p>improvements rates are lower.</p> <p>Teacher Z: The teacher and parents must work together, the parents need to be shown the value of them monitoring the child at home and also encouraging them.</p>
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Finally table 4.4 will explore the themes in response to Research Question 3: What are some of the corrective measures used by teachers to assist pupils who are repeating the academic year?

Table 4.4 highlights the themes of teacher involvement, differentiated instruction and motivational strategies.

Theme/Code	Definition of Theme/Code	Associated Participant's Responses
1. Teacher involvement	Teacher specific ways they help/make a difference to the repeater	<p>Teacher X: Teachers can also use varied approaches to teaching in an effort to cater to multiple intelligences. As a teacher, we have to find solutions to obstacles faced by students.</p> <p>Teacher Y: I also use a</p>

		<p>different approach to concept teaching because these children don't learn in the same manner as most of the others.</p> <p>Teacher Z: Sometimes I try individual attention to make sure handwriting at least is improving. I give the pupils a chance to answer questions orally and to read for the class as well.</p>
<p>2. Differentiated instruction</p>	<p>Strategies which are used to help repeater</p>	<p>Teacher X: Students are given opportunities for one to one teaching, extra attention and group work. I used varied teaching strategies. I try to make the lessons and the learning experience enjoyable and fun. I use a hands on approach to teaching and learning. I ensure that goals are</p>

		<p>achievable so that the students will experience success.</p> <p>We can also try pairing weaker students with stronger ones. I also believe that parents need to become more involved</p> <p>Teacher Y: I have tried strategies such as tiered instruction and assessment these I have noticed to be a positive method for teaching students who are repeating.</p>
<p>3. Motivational strategies</p>	<p>Strategies used to encourage repeaters.</p>	<p>Teacher X: Praises and rewards help build a their confidence and it improves performance.</p> <p>Teacher Y: I think we need to address the underlying issues. After this is done then we can implement motivational strategies such as a reward system.</p> <p>Teacher Z: Teachers can also</p>

		use rewards to motivate the child.
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4.2 Summary of findings

This chapter presented the findings gleaned as a result of the study. The researcher conceptualized the study in an effort to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions of grade repetition as an intervention strategy for correcting low academic achievement. The ensuing data collection and analysis provided answers for each of the sub questions stated in chapter three. Emerging themes spoke of factors which guide their use of the practice, the mixed views teachers had concerning the strategy. The roles teacher believed parents play in their child's education and ways they try to remedy learner deficiencies as well as those used to encourage learner strengths.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter seeks to reprise the findings and discuss them in relation to the literature. The researcher garnered a lot of insight into the phenomenon of grade repetition as it is perceived by the teachers at the school and will try to link these experiences to those which are found existing in other places where grade repetition is practiced.

5.1 Discussion of findings

The issue of grade repetition is one which continues to baffle educators since there are so many contradictory opinions of the entire phenomenon . Two of the teachers in the study had interactions with students who had been retained previously and based on their experience realized that even if there was an improvement in the learner, no great impression was made to the learner. Jimerson (2012) stated that existing research has shown that neither grade retention nor social promotion alone is an effective strategy for improving students' academic, behavioural and social and emotional success. This supports the discussion with the participants and the inconclusive responses of the benefits. In addition Jimerson (2012) speaks to the great number of "deleterious effects on student performance and long term outcomes." The participants in the study indicated that the effects of grade repetition are manifested differently for each learner that has repeated. Therefore the strategy itself cannot be used as a blanketed one to deal with the deficiencies which are seen in learners. This is supported in the research which postulates that while benefits are seen in some learners, there hasn't been a method that has shown empirical evidence of foretelling who will and won't benefit (Jimerson, 2012). Studies which were done

by Ferugson, Jimerson and Dalton (2001 cited in Jimerson) were able to identify some factors which could be linked to the greater possibility of positive outcomes.

While Silberglitt et al (2006 cited in Jimerson) showed that even where assumptions are made of the positive effects of the strategy in the earlier years, empirical evidence contradicts this since grade retention has proven to be "ineffective across grade levels." Halverstadt's (2009, p. 67-68) study of elementary teachers, from kindergarten through fifth grade used the pupils own marks during the first and repeated year as a comparison and guide to the benefits of the practice. However, these provide a misleading assumption that there are some positive effects. According to Xia and Glennie, cited in Halverstadt, (2005) research shows that retained students would have made just as much or more academic progress without the retention. Jimerson et al (2004, cited in Halverstadt) believes that, 'initial improvements in achievement may occur the following year the student is retained. However many research meta-analyses show that achievement gains decline within 2 to 3 years.'

Teachers in this study agreed that while it's not the only factor for use of the strategy, readiness for the next level plays a significant part in the recommendations for repeating. Ragne et. al (2012) explored the work done by other researchers and state that "Grant (1997) calls the connection of grade retention to maturity the 'readiness dilemma' in which teachers believe learning is sequential and primary grade students simply need more time to learn. (Beswick et al, 2008, Tomchin and Impara, 1992)". However the overriding concern was the fact that the development levels of all learners are different and without the necessary diagnostic testing teachers run the risk of increasing learner frustrations as well as that of class teachers. Learners whose problems run deeper than acquisition of content at the particular level will not benefit

from this "gift of time" instead they will act out, be distractions to other children in the class and disrupt the teachers' effective delivery of the curriculum.

In addition to this, the ill effects which are supported in the literature was recorded by the teachers as well. Students in their experiences were either prone to becoming bullies, exerting the assumption of authority that they see attached to them being older than the other children in the class. On the other hand, students could regress further due to feelings of inadequacy which rise up after seeing their peers/friends moving forward and they being left behind. Stapleton and Pina (n.d.) looked at grade retention using Erikson's theory as a comparative benchmark and noted that students in the middle school grades (upper primary to mid secondary) begin to gain an understanding of self. As they move through grades they are with the same classmates unless retention occurs. This causes what the research terms "peer separation" (Alexander et al, 1994 cited in Stapleton and Pina). This will unavoidably cause self esteem issues. The child may have to face the brunt of jokes, bullying and other negative experiences. It is in light of this that educators have to pay special consideration to the deleterious effects to the learner. (Stapleton and Pina, n.d.)

The research supports the statements which were made by teachers regarding the apparent differences they noted based on the level of parental involvement and the supports received both from the home and at home. Parental involvement can be considered "any activity that empowers parents and families to participate in the educational process either at home or in a programme setting" (Rokwell, Andre and Hawley, 1996, p. 13 cited in Ntho Ntho). This study also highlights the fact that parental involvement reduces behaviour problems and lower learners' repetition and dropout rates. (p. 11) Range et al (2012) gleaned findings which showed that while there wasn't substantial evidence in the literature that "grade retention increased parents'

motivation to work with their children. This view of parental involvement and motivation as a reason for grade retention is important to highlight and cannot be underscored in the success of the child especially since "school success begins at birth" (Jones, 1989 cited in Ntho Ntho). " Brophy (2006, p. 24) stated that teachers should seek to collaborate with parents, not only that but they should maintain close communication with them as well and invite them to visit the classroom, finally parents should be provided with the instructional materials so that they can give the support the child needs at home.

Teachers in this study made the connection to the role parental support has positively impacted on the learner. Parents who realized that their children were in fact struggling and needed the extra assistance and rendered such did influence effective change as far as the teachers noted. Learners whose parents continued to show little or no support at home, made little progress. Owings and Kaplan (2001) also underscores the need for 'creating effective home-school partnerships between parents and teachers."

In spite of the challenges faced the teachers felt that the onus was on them to assist the learner and as such made provisions to do so. Teachers modified learning strategies and differentiated their instruction as well. Johnson and Rudolph(n.d.) quoted Tomlinson (2002, p. 2) who said,

'At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.'

They used various monitoring strategies and tried as best as possible to give the children some extra individual assistance. However the challenge to this comes from the fact that

at the Achieving Primary School, the school environment isn't conducive to that. The classes are overcrowded and separations between classes are nonexistent. Teachers are under added pressures to maintain the high academic achievement levels at the school and as such struggling learner tend to get left behind as the teacher races to complete the curriculum in a timely fashion. What the researcher found very obvious was the role that higher educational attainment on the teachers' part played in guiding their practice. The two younger teachers who had completed their Bachelors of Education had a more progressive approach to struggling learners and the learning process. They utilized a lot of contemporary strategies in an effort to make a concerted difference to the learners. They looked at the learners through the lens of multiple intelligences and valued the individual learner and tried to fix problems individually. The older teacher on the other hand, was focused as is the custom in our educational context on completing the curriculum and as such, there was little she did to monitor the children who were repeating. She tried as best as possible to just ensure they had handwriting capabilities and could read and respond orally. She noted that she made the effort based on that which was displayed by the repeating learner. Meaning, if they showed signs of effort then she was keen to monitor them more closely and render assistance.

Teachers spoke as well of the differences they believed motivational practices made to the learner, especially regarding rewards and praise. Burnett (cited in Wright, 2001) believes the effects of praise on student behaviour comes about because it shows the child that the teacher not only endorses but gives an indication of what behaviours meet the teachers anticipations. Furthermore Akin, Eckert, Lovett and Little (cited in Wright, 2004) have the belief that praise will improve student academic or behavioural performance, but only if the pupils sees it as beneficial. Brophy (1998) states that, "Rewards can act as motivators only for those student

who believe that they have a chance to get the rewards if they put forth reasonable effort." (p. 111). The implication of this to the study is the fact that teachers have to make the goals attainable for the struggling learner so that they can gain intrinsic motivation in order to reflect extrinsic gains.

Teachers overall views on the strategies showed that the effects of grade repetition are very learner specific, so that what might work for one student wouldn't necessarily work for another even when both are faced with the phenomena of grade repetition. Although they are familiar with strategies to maximize learner potentials there are limitations and restrictions which are specific to their school context at the Achieving Primary School. The implications for future practice were very apparent as all of the teachers were of the opinion that grade repetition isn't something that teachers recommend children for out of spite but rather teachers must be very deliberate in the selection in order to avoid teacher and student frustrations as well as other negative outcomes aforementioned in the chapter as well as in the literature review.

5.2 Recommendations

Having spent quality time both in the field gathering data as well interacting with it in an effort to garner teachers perceptions of the phenomena of grade repetition, I believe there are certain recommendations that can be made which if implemented can make a significant difference for struggling learners. The issue of limitations which arise as a result of infrastructural conditions cannot be changed however with a new school building currently being constructed teachers would have that obstacle removed.

Jimerson (2012) advocated for schoolwide interventions the goal of which would,

"provide a context within which students who are at risk of failure are recognized early and receive appropriate interventions, to create a safe,

positive school climate and to provide a seamless set of supports that integrates as necessary across classes and intervention tiers and between home, school and community." (p. 14)

National policy recommendations. The Ministry of Education's thrust behind the mandatory early childhood education, and an overarching goal that looks at reversing the effects of school failure in Trinidad and Tobago by engaging all early years educators with professional development skills in an effort to convert the system in its entirety into one that provides vivacious learning experiences for not only the younger children but the educator as well. In keeping with this progressive movement they have realized that there is a link between the foundation that is gained at the preschool levels and the experience the learner has at continuing levels. If key concepts are not taught well or are misunderstood by the learners they run the risk of struggling later on in their life. They have certain recommendations which they intend to put into practice to remedy the existing flaw in the system and ensure seamless, successful achievement is attained by all students. These include;

- ~ Creation of standards for teacher preparation, certification, in-service training and on-going professional growth
- ~ Instituting policies which will prevent early school failure through the provision of affordable, high quality child-care and education services to young children and their families, especially those from lower socio economic backgrounds.
- ~ Equipping all primary school teachers with skills for teaching reading and early childhood education.

- ~ Developing policies and provide incentives to draw and keep the best teachers.
 - ~ Reducing class sizes in the early primary levels.
 - ~ Support within school districts available for students in danger of failing.
 - ~ Provision of after –school tutoring/ vacation programmes for at risk students.
 - ~ Forging stronger connections between pre-school and primary school by attaching preschool centres to schools with low student enrolment.
 - ~ Placing proficiently qualified early childhood persons in infant and lower junior levels in primary schools.
 - ~ Schools identified with large number of at risk students should be provided with staff specially trained to meet the needs of those students.
 - ~ Development of Integrated Curriculum Modules for use with children in early primary grades to promote learning and development across domains.
- (OAS Hemispheric Report, 2004)

School specific recommendations. Teachers at the Achieving Primary School meet on a regular basis to conduct discussions concerning the school's running but little discussion and emphasis is placed on ways to assist the struggling students especially since the majority of the school's population is performing at or beyond standards. However for all learners to gain the utmost out of the educational experience, teachers have to collaborate and discuss the learners in an effort to gain the seamless advancement through the levels and avoid as best as possible school failure. In addition, in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals-Education for All, teachers have to make a concerted effort to target struggling learners and find solutions to

remedy this malady at the school level. Teacher conferencing will assist teachers who have struggling learner in their classes to gain assistance, whether it is just through strategic suggestions or via actual hand on help from their peers. Some teachers at the Achieving Primary School, especially those who have many years of teaching experience are apprehensive when it comes to seeking help especially when it comes from younger more academically qualified peers. It is my belief though that there is strength in asking for assistance and exchanging ideas on process. Teachers will not only be able to build each other up but by extension they will be able to assist the learners who are the greatest resource to a country's future development.

At the Achieving Primary School, teachers need to utilize the referral option which is now offered by Student Support Services to assist learners who they believe are in need of tests outside of that which the teacher can provide so as to determine whether the child's problems are deeper than just misunderstandings of the concepts. Special classes should be put in place where children who are struggling can get the support they need, such as an after school remediation programme. There are teachers who are willing to volunteer an hour after school to assist students who cannot get the individual attention they need during the school day. Teachers need to be made aware as well that the onus is on them, if they have a child repeating in their class, to find ways and means to bring this child up to standard, if the issue is conceptually based or a matter of readiness. Repeaters shouldn't simply have to spend another year at the same level 'making up time' only to be left either in a worse off position or not greatly improved.

5.3 Conclusion and Reflection

When this study was conceptualized the researcher was concerned about the ways in which teachers went about recommending children to repeat a year. This was due to the fact that

the benefits of the practice weren't evident in most cases. Due to the way the practice of grade repetition is implemented at the Achieving Primary School, the researcher is led to the conclusion that the practice is ineffective. This supported by the research and the discussion with the participants. In addition even though there isn't any evidence in our local context that supports the argument that retained students drop out of school later on, the research does provide other supporting arguments showing that there isn't any substantial strength in the practice. It means that as educators we have to be reflective in our practice, this also means that we have to move away from traditional and somewhat archaic practices which do not help students but sometimes compound their problems.

As a young educator this research has really assisted me in rethinking the entire process of grade repetition. In the past I have been guilty of recommending students for repetition but engagement with the literature and discussions with colleagues has made me think not just twice but multiple times now about the practice. As a reflective practitioner I know that in future I will be more critical when it comes to recommending the practice, if such is done at all.

APPENDIX A

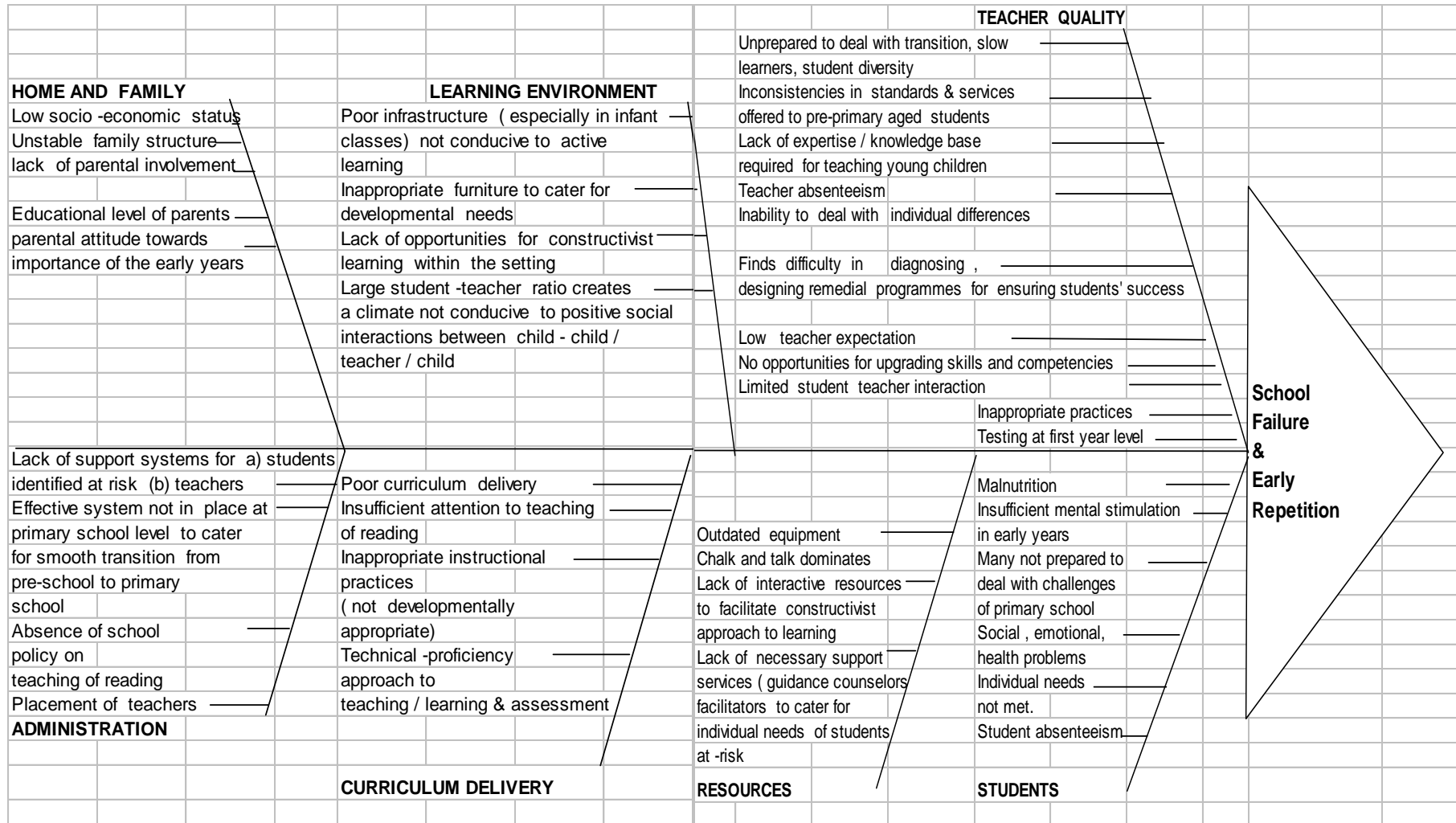
PRIMARY SCHOOL REPEATERS BY GRADE AND SEX : 2004-2005 TO 2008-2009

Academic Years	Infant Year 1		Infant Year 2		Standard 1		Standard 2	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
2008-2009								
Enrolment	10,610	9,603	9,525	8,960	9,724	8,981	9,256	8,993
Dropouts	9	4	17	6	18	19	14	11
Repeaters	1,286	757	697	451	594	353	369	252
2007-2008								
Enrolment	10101	9356	9718	9098	9729	9068	9155	8675
Dropouts	28	18	28	18	29	15	30	23
Repeaters	1334	861	761	461	691	436	399	284
2006-2007								
Enrolment	10452	9394	9642	9180	9704	8830	8972	8725
Dropouts	11	11	21	8	24	14	22	23
Repeaters	686	444	312	208	299	147	246	153
2005-2006								
Enrolment	10069	9295	9579	8750	8996	8599	9154	8695
Dropouts	12	10	7	14	14	6	19	14
Repeaters	1289	783	569	378	491	294	513	285
2004-2005								
Enrolment	10229	9055	8933	8549	9174	8766	9287	8817
Dropouts	17	13	19	10	20	15	23	16
Repeaters	1280	776	593	422	496	261	483	302

APPENDIX A

Standard 3		Standard 4		Standard 5		TOTAL		
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	MF
9,339	8,632	9,200	8,831	9,194	8,827	66848	62827	129675
11	16	25	12	32	11	126	79	205
479	330	551	406	617	443	4593	2992	7585
9205	8706	9339	9018	9466	8993	66726	62915	129641
34	27	29	16	51	15	229	132	361
557	370	629	486	780	566	5170	3466	8636
9317	8856	9613	9048	9347	9147	67054	63188	130242
28	20	26	18	19	4	151	98	249
334	170	303	170	179	152	2359	1444	3803
9402	8815	9816	9244	9608	9122	66651	62528	129179
9	8	55	16	27	25	143	93	236
607	314	726	420	332	351	4527	2825	7352
9798	9252	10182	9381	9827	9974	67454	63809	131263
29	19	29	23	22	12	160	108	268
520	312	699	408	297	355	4375	2837	7212

Source: Primary School Annual Statistical Return



APPENDIX B

Source: OAS HEMISPHERIC ECCE TEAM REPORT OCTOBER, 2004

APPENDIX C

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

I am currently completing my Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in Youth Guidance. I am seeking your cooperation in completing my final project, which is a paper entitled; An Investigation into Teachers' Perception into Grade Repetition as an intervention strategy for correcting low academic performance.

I request permission to conduct my research at your school. This letter serves to inform you that all the information gathered from this study will be used solely for research purposed and that anonymity of all involved is guaranteed.

I trust that you will kindly grant me the consent in conducting my research.

Thanking you in anticipation of your kind cooperation;

Respectfully

Victoria Avian Rajkumar

APPENDIX D

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear colleague,

I am currently completing my Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in Youth Guidance. I am seeking your cooperation in completing my final project, which is a paper entitled; An Investigation into Teachers' Perception into Grade Repetition as an intervention strategy for correcting low academic performance.

Your willingness to participate in this study would require you to meet with the researcher for a face to face interview as well as follow up where necessary. I would like to assure you that all information disseminated would be used solely for the purposes of the research project and would be treated with strict protocols of anonymity and confidentiality.

Thanking you in anticipation of your kind cooperation;

Sincerely,

Victoria Avian Rajkumar

I, _____ accede to Ms Rajkumar's request to participate in her investigation and assist her in whatever way I can.

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted in the school's computer room which is the quietest place in the school. Teachers were made comfortable with preliminary chatter concerning happenings at the school. The purpose of the study was explained to each participant and the informed consent documents signed. The interviewer gathered background information from the participants as well regarding their professional life- number of years in the service, teaching experiences and academic qualifications. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes.

Grand Tour Question: What are teachers' perceptions of grade repetition as an intervention strategy for correcting low academic achievement

Sub Questions	Related Questions
<p>4. What are the impacts of grade repetition, as perceived by teachers who practiced the intervention strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What is your philosophy on grade repetition? b) Are you aware of any relationship which exists between children repeating a grade and dropping out of school later on? c) Are you aware of any psychological effects on students due to grade repetition or have you witnessed any effect due to grade repetition? d) Do you feel that the child's self esteem is affected because of grade repetition and do you consider a child's self concept when recommending grade repetition? e) Do you think the practice of grade repetition is positive or negative for the children involved? f) How do you view students who have been retained who are currently enrolled in your class? g) What are some other observations that you have made of pupils who 'stay down'? h) Would you categorically state that all the students who you have known to repeat benefitted from the experience?

<p>5. From a teachers' perspective, does grade repetition lead to improvement in student performance?</p>	<p>i) Would you recommend repetition in the future?</p> <p>a) How many pupils did you recommend for repetition last year?</p> <p>b) How many repeaters do you have in your class this year?</p> <p>c) Is academic achievement the only criteria used for recommending a student to be retained or do you consider other factors?</p> <p>d) Based on academic scores, would you say that there have been improvements in those children who are repeating?</p> <p>e) In relation to grade repetition what factors do you believe inhibit students' achievement of learning outcomes?</p> <p>f) Explain, based on your experiences whether there has been a significant change in the academic performance of the students who have been retained.</p> <p>g) From your experience, have all the retained students shown signs of academic improvements? What are some ways?</p>
<p>6. What are some of the instructional strategies used by teachers to assist pupils who are repeating the academic year?</p>	<p>a) Do you think there are alternatives which can be used to remedy underachievement other than grade repetition?</p> <p>b) What is your biggest frustration about grade repetition?</p> <p>c) In your practice, explain how you modify your teaching to cater for students who are repeating the academic year.</p>

APPENDIX F- TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW X

Question 1: What is your philosophy on grade repetition?

Answer: It is my belief that grade repetition remedies, in most cases, a lack of readiness or maturity in students. It gives them the extra time to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills needed to move on to another level Extra time to catch up
Lack of readiness or maturity

Question 2: Are you aware of any relationship which exists between children repeating a grade and dropping out of school later on?

Answer: No

Question 3: Are you aware of any psychological effects on students due to grade repetition or have you witnessed any effect due to grade repetition?

Answer: Students who repeat sometimes demonstrate feelings of frustration, low self esteem, are self conscious in class with new students and take some time to ~~socializes~~ socialize with classmates
Self conscious with new peers
Low self esteem
Frustration

Question 4: What is your biggest frustration about grade repetition?

Answer: My biggest frustration comes from parents who do not give their child extra assistance and support at home.
No parental support from the home

Question 5: Do you feel that the child's self esteem is affected because of grade repetition and do you consider a child's self concept when recommending grade repetition?

Answer: Yes, I think the child's self esteem is affected negatively and I do consider the child's self concept when I am recommending grade repetition. However I discuss with the parents, the positive effects that may occur. These include building self confidence. The children are going to be able to do something and even if they don't get up to the level of the other students they are still achieving. Builds self confidence

Question 6: Do you think the practice of grade repetition is a positive or negative for the children involved?

Answer: It is a practice that is seen as negative by the children involved because they feel a sense of inadequacy being left back and alone because they now have to make new friends. Their self esteem also takes a blow, especially if taunted by their friends who are going on to another

grade. Added to all of this there is the negative opinion parents have passed on to their child. It's about self fulfilling prophesy [Parents have negative attitudes - Self esteem](#) [Negative practice](#)

Question 7: How do you view students who have been retained who are currently enrolled in your class?

Answer: I see them as students who need extra assistance/guidance and a boost of confidence to help them achieve their goals. These students have the ability to learn and master all the knowledge and skills but the obstacles they face cause them to struggle and all they need is a little extra help and guidance to do so. ["Need extra assistance/guidance and a boost of confidence to help them achieve their goals."](#)

Question 8: Is academic achievement the only criteria used for recommending a student to be retained or do you consider other factors?

Answer: Age and maturity levels are also taken into consideration. [Age and maturity](#)

Question 9: How many pupils did you recommend for repetition last year?

Answer: One

Question 10: How many repeaters o you have in your class this year?

Answer: Two

Question 11: Based on academic scores, would you say that there have been improvements in those children who are repeating?

Answer: Yes I have seen improvements such as their reading and writing have gotten better, they are more vocal, so they aren't as reserved when doing presentations or anything oral in class. [Improvements seen in repeaters](#)

Question 12: In relation to grade repetition what factors do you believe inhibit students' achievement of learning outcomes?

Answer: Students may not see the value of school, there are sometimes no support and discipline at home. They may also be focused [on](#) and distracted by play, family life problems. There's also maturation levels as well as lack of interest in school work [No interest in school work, only interested in play](#) . [Problems at home](#) [Lack of support at home](#)

Question 13: In your practice, explain how you modify your teaching to cater for students who are repeating the academic year.

Answer: Students are given opportunities for one to one teaching, extra attention and group work. I used varied teaching strategies. I try to make the lessons and the learning experience

enjoyable and fun. I use a hands on approach to teaching and learning. I ensure that goals are achievable so that the students will experience success. [Strategies to help learners \(in vivo\)](#)

Question 14: What are some overall observations that you have made of pupils who 'stay down'?

Answer: I think these pupils generally improve with extra assistance. Praises and rewards help build a their confidence and it improves performance. In my experience, if little support is given at home, the improvements rates are lower. I have also noticed that more males than females stay down. But they usually settle into their new class and are happy [Praises and rewards help build confidence and this improves performance](#) . [Extra help makes a difference](#) [Support from home makes a difference](#)

Question 15: Explain, based on your experiences whether there has been a significant change in the academic performance of the students who have been retained.

Answer: I have seen a huge change in the academic performance of students who have been retained. However, these changes are most noticeable in the children who get the extra help at home. For those who don't get help, there is a smaller change. They are also more confident and eager to work. [Pupils are more confident and eager to learn](#) [Assistance from the home makes a difference](#)

Question 16: From your experience, have all the retained students shown signs of academic improvements? What are some ways?

Answer: All the students who repeated showed signs of academic improvements but not all to the same extent. For some, reading is improved. Others, it improved their communication and reasoning skills. Many of them were now able to complete work in less time and do it correctly. [Repetition is beneficial but different results for different children](#)

Question 17: Do you think there are alternatives which can be used to remedy underachievement other than grade repetition?

Answer: Yes I believe teachers can create individualized lesson plans, parents can get a tutor or send the child for lessons. Teachers can also use varied approaches to teaching in an effort to cater to multiple intelligences. As a teacher, we have to find solutions to obstacles faced by students. We can also try pairing weaker students with stronger ones. I also believe that parents need to become more involved [Teacher has to come up with solutions to help children](#) . [Teachers need to cater to multiple intelligences](#) [Individual assistance is necessary in and out of school](#)

Question 18: Would you categorically state that all the students who you have known to repeat benefitted from the experience?

Answer: In my somewhat limited experience I have seen students improve. They were able to move from one level to another. The mastered to different extents, knowledge, skills and abilities

they were unable to before. They were much more confident and self assured in themselves and their ability to perform tasks in the classroom. Noticeable positive changes for students

Question 19: Would you recommend repetition in the future?

Answer: Yes, I definitely would. This because of the benefits I have seen. The pupils were able to reach where they should and they do have a greater sense of self and they have more self esteem. Grade repetition is beneficial and "I would recommend it in future because of the benefits I have seen.

APPENDIX G- The Coding Process

Interview Ms X

<u>Raw data</u>	<u>Preliminary code</u>	<u>Final code</u>
<p>#1 Grade repetition remedies a lack of readiness or maturity in students It gives them the extra time to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills needed to move on to another level</p>	<p>Lack of readiness or maturity Extra time needed to catch up</p>	<p>Readiness</p>
<p># 3 ...demonstrate feelings of frustration, low self esteem, self conscious in new class</p>	<p>Frustration Low self esteem Self conscious with new peers</p>	<p>Self esteem issues</p>
<p># 4 Biggest frustration comes from parents who do not give their child the extra support and assistance at home</p>	<p>No parental support from the home</p>	<p>Parental involvement</p>
<p># 5 There are positives effects to grade repetition such as building self confidence and even if they don't get up to the level of the others they are still achieving</p>	<p>Builds self confidence</p>	<p>Self esteem</p>
<p># 6 Children feel a sense of inadequacy being left back and alone because they have to make new friends Self esteem takes a blow especially in light of taunting by friends who moved up Parents have negative opinions which are passed onto the child-like a self fulfilling prophesy</p>	<p>Negative practice Self esteem Parents have negative attitudes</p>	<p>Parental involvement Self esteem</p>
<p>#7 "An individual who needs extra assistance/guidance and a boost of confidence to help them achieve their goals" They have the ability to learn and master all the knowledge and skills but they struggle and all they need is a little extra help and guidance to do so</p>	<p>Children need support and encouragement</p>	<p>Teacher involvement</p>
<p># 8 Age and maturity are considered in grade retention as well</p>		

# 11 Improvements seen in areas of reading and writing, more vocal		Benefits of g.r.
#12 No support and discipline at home. Focused on and distracted by play Family life problems Maturation and interest in school work	Lack of support at home Distracted by play Problems at home	Parental involvement
# 13 Students are given opportunities for one to one teaching, extra attention and group work. I used varied teaching strategies. I try to make the lessons and the learning experience enjoyable and fun. I use a hands on approach to teaching and learning. I ensure that goals are achievable so that the students will experience success.	Differently instructional strategies	Differentiated instruction
# 14 I think these pupils generally improve with extra assistance. Praises and rewards help build a their confidence and it improves performance. If little support is given at home, the improvements rates are lower. More males than females	Support from home makes a difference Extra help makes a difference Praises and rewards help build confidence and this improves performance	Parental involvement Motivation strategies
# 15 I have seen a huge change in the academic performance of students who have been retained. However, these changes are most noticeable in the children who get the extra help at home. For those who don't get help, there is a smaller change.	Assistance from home makes the difference Pupils are more confident and eager to learn	Parental involvement
# 16 All the students who repeated showed signs of academic improvements but not all to the same extent. For some, reading is improved. Others, it improved their communication and reasoning skills. Many of them were now able to complete work in less time and do it correctly.	Repetition is beneficial but different results for different children	Benefits of repetition
# 17 Yes I believe teachers can create individualized lesson plans, parents can get a tutor or send the child for lessons. Teachers can also use varied approaches to teaching in an effort to cater to multiple intelligences. As a teacher, we have to find solutions to obstacles faced by students. We can also try pairing	Individual assistance is necessary in and out of school Teacher need to cater to multiple intelligences Teacher has to come up with	Teacher involvement

weaker students with stronger ones. I also believe that parents need to become more involved	solutions to help children	
# 18 I have seen students improve. They were able to move from one level to another. They mastered to different extents, knowledge, skills and abilities they were unable to before. They were much more confident and self assured in themselves and their ability to perform tasks in the classroom.	Noticeable positive changes for students	Benefits of repetition
# 19 Yes, I definitely would. This because of the benefits I have seen. The pupils were able to reach where they should and they do have a greater sense of self and they have more self esteem.	Grade repetition is beneficial and a practice teacher would continue	Support for practice

Interview Sir Y

<u>Raw data</u>	<u>Preliminary codes</u>	<u>Final code</u>
# 1 I think grade repetition may be inefficient in most cases because the problem may not be readiness for the next level but rather a learning disability. It means that the strategy of repeating may work for some students, like those who developed slower but students like these usually can catch up without repeating.	Inefficient strategy, the problem may not be readiness Children need to be assessed for learning disabilities	Learner deficiencies Diagnostic testing necessary
# 3 students who have repeated often have a lower self esteem and develop social issues, especially if they have this mentality that this level they are repeating is beneath them. They also sometimes take advantage of the other students in the class because they feel since they are older they can exercise authority based on that fact	Self esteem negatively affected Social issues e.g. bullying	Self esteem Bullying
# 4 Students that repeat often have behavioural issues and show little motivation. Sometimes this affects the behaviour of the other children in the class as well.	Hurts self esteem	Self esteem
# 5 I believe that a child's self esteem can be hurt when repeating and a child's self concept must always be taken into consideration when teachers make decisions concerning the child	Learner differences means learner specific solutions	Self esteem Differences in learners
# 6 may be positive for some students but not all. I believe that the majority of students that repeat do not benefit from it. Each child is different and their individual problems with learning needs individual solutions. Repeating is not a solution for all of the problems learner have	Repeaters need assistance individually	Teacher involvement
# 7 I view repeaters in my class as individuals who are in need of special assistance to unlock their true potential		

<p># 8 Academic achievement isn't the only criteria I look at, I look at the attendance records and age as well. These can show if the child's academic downfall isn't simply because of the child's inability but rather just a gap in their knowledge acquisition or an issue with their readiness for the level</p>	<p>There are many factors influencing recommendations for repeating</p>	<p>Factors impacting on repeating</p>
<p># 11 Has shown some results in some areas, not all</p>		
<p># 12 Children...often suffer with low self esteem issues...they are not self motivated</p>		
<p># 13 Strategies such as tiered instruction and assessment...different approach to concept teaching because these children don't learn in the same manner as most of the others</p>	<p>Differentiation in instruction</p> <p>Approaches concepts differently to benefit the child</p>	<p>Differentiating instruction</p>
<p># 14 Repeated students (overall) have a negative approach to learning and show negative changes in behaviour</p>	<p>Repeaters have a negative approach to learning</p>	<p>Self efficacy</p>
<p>#15 Very little change but in some cases there has been positive change</p>		
<p># 16 Some students have shown improvements. I have *Emma now in STD 4, I taught this class in STD 1 and she was repeating with them at the time, now I have seen her having greater competency in writing but otherwise there hasn't been much change. In the case of *Bruce who I taught in STD 1 last year, there were no improvements at all.</p>	<p>Repeating affects different children differently</p>	<p>Learner specific</p>
<p># 17 Finding the source of the problem is the first step as they may vary, some children underperform because of emotional, developmental or psychological issues. I think we need to address the underlying issues. After</p>	<p>Children have to be assessed and tested to see if problems aren't deeper</p> <p>Teachers have to cater for learner differences, learning</p>	<p>Diagnostic testing</p> <p>Motivational</p>

<p>this is done then we can implement motivational strategies such as a reward system. As teachers we need to cater to the child's individual learning style and interests</p>	<p>styles and interests Motivate children via rewards</p>	<p>strategies</p>
<p># 18 I really don't think repeating has benefitted all students who had to because repeating was not the correct solution for the child's academic development issues</p>	<p>Repeating hasn't benefitted all students</p>	<p>Inconclusive benefits</p>
<p># 19 I really wouldn't recommend it, because it makes no sense, well actually, if the issue is a learning disability then it makes no sense but if it's about readiness and I think the child would be able to get up to the level because of the additional year in the class, then yes I would. It would all be based on the individual child and the issue</p>	<p>Recommendation has to be based on individual children and their needs</p>	<p>Support for practice</p>

Interview Ms Z

<u>Raw data</u>	<u>Preliminary codes</u>	<u>Final code</u>
# 1 I don't think that it works for all children because of readiness to learn and attitude towards work. Regular supervision by parents makes a difference. But teachers need to monitor these pupils constantly	Readiness to learn and attitude towards work Parental involvement makes a difference but teachers need to monitor these pupils	Readiness Parental involvement
# 4 I am not able to monitor these children properly because of the big class sizes at our school. Then there is the challenge of parents who aren't willing to cooperate with the teacher. Here as well, there is the challenge to get the curriculum work covered in a certain time and as such there isn't a lot of time to go over work some children might not understand or do a lot of revision at school	Class sizes hinder effective assistance Parental involvement poses a challenge	School structure Parental involvement
# 5 Of course a child's self esteem is hindered because of this. But one has to take into consideration the teacher and pupil's frustration if the child is promoted and goes to another teacher's class. And while it is important to consider the child's self concept sometimes it becomes necessary to repeat a child	Negative impact on self esteem but sometimes necessary Teacher and pupil's frustration if learner is not ready for the next level	Self esteem Frustration
# 6 Some children respond well to this as progress is seen in many areas if not all. On the other hand, other children show no improvement	Consequences are learner specific	Learner specific
# 7 Some of the children have shown progress and this has encouraged me to monitor them often but others have the same attitude to the work and their lack of commitment remains as it was the first time around	Teacher's response is based on learner progress	Teacher involvement

# 8 For me, academic achievement is the main criteria		
# 11 One has shown a lot of improvement. The other is absent quite often, he is capable of improving but is not encouraged at home.	Improvement is learner specific	Learner specific
# 12 I think that the lack of individual attention affects them, that and the fact that the work given is not suitable for their level. At our school the chaotic environment- the noise and the overcrowding play a big part in affecting them. At home there isn't any motivation from the parents and at school there isn't any motivation from the teachers	There is the need for individual attention which is not addressed at the school	Teacher involvement
# 13 At our school there is no time to do a lot of modification. Sometimes I try individual attention to make sure handwriting at least is improving. I give the pupils a chance to answer questions orally and to read for the class as well	Challenges of the school don't allow for modification Equips pupils with necessary life skills	School structure Teacher involvement
# 14 Some of the pupils need this as they show that they are a little more mature and are now ready to do what they could not understand before. But some remain at the same level even with the additional year	Repeating is learner specific and affects different pupils differently	Learner specific
# 15 To me, few have shown any significant change. There might be changes in some areas, for example, improved focus, improvements in handwriting, in their reading as well.	Minor improvements	Limited benefits
# 16 Not all have shown improvements		
# 17 A slow learner needs to be in a class where they can be given individual attention and modification of learning and teaching materials. The teacher and parents must work together, the parents need to be shown the value of them monitoring the child at home and also	Individual attention is a must for children who are struggling academically Motivate students using	Teacher involvement Motivational strategies

encouraging them. Teachers can also use rewards to motivate the child	rewards	
# 18 Of course not, not all have benefitted. Our school environment has hindered these children's ability to progress at their level, the physical arrangement play a huge part in all of this. The classes are too big and teachers can't pay much attention to them. Meeting the standards of the curriculum as well does not cater for this	The school environment has negative effects on the child who needs and will benefit from individual attention	School structure
# 19 I would most definitely not recommend children to repeat again at this school. It doesn't make any sense, in our situation, we have no separations between classes, there isn't any time for individual work or to modify the curriculum to meet their needs, the child will just get lost, become frustrated and then frustrate the teacher	Repeating especially in a school environment like that one, makes no sense for the learner because there isn't time for individual attention	Support for practice

Codes		
<u>Interview X</u>	<u>Interview Y</u>	<u>Interview Z</u>
Readiness	Learner deficiencies-readiness/ L.D.	Readiness
Self esteem issues	Diagnostic testing	Parental involvement
Parental involvement	Differentiated instruction	School structure
Teacher involvement	Motivational strategies	Self esteem
Benefits of grade repetition	Self esteem/ Social issues-bullying	Frustration
Differentiated instruction		Learner specific

<p>Motivation strategies</p> <p>Support for practice</p>	<p>Learner differences</p> <p>Teacher involvement</p> <p>Factors affecting repeating</p> <p>Self efficacy</p> <p>Learner specific</p> <p>Inconclusive benefits</p> <p>Support for practice</p>	<p>Teacher involvement</p> <p>Limited benefits</p> <p>Motivational strategies</p> <p>Support for practice</p>
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Codes	Emerging themes/categories
1. Readiness	Factors which guide the practice SQ1
2. Learner deficiencies (e.g. L.D.)	
1. Self esteem/ social issues	Effects on the repeater SQ1
2. Self efficacy	
1. Benefits of repetition Inconclusive benefits (Learner specific) Limited benefits	Teachers share mixed views on the issue SQ 2
2. Support for practice	
3. Parental involvement	Roles parents play in children's education SQ 2
1. Teacher involvement	Ways to remedy learner deficiencies and encourage learner benefits SQ 3
2. Differentiated instruction	
3. Motivational strategies	

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