

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GRADE RETENTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS' PERCEPTIONS OF BEING HELD BACK

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all young students who struggle in school.

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ABSTRACT
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GRADE RETENTION: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS' PERCEPTIONS OF BEING
HELD BACK

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Studies dating back to the 1920s have argued the effects of retention on the academic achievement, social adjustment, and emotional states of students. Researchers have shown the detrimental outcomes as well as the benefits of holding students back in elementary school. Studies regarding the phenomenon are substantially quantitative, and comparatively, qualitative studies are few in number. This study fills a void in the qualitative research by examining the experiences of 22 high school seniors, all of whom planned to participate in post high school education, who have been held back a grade in elementary school. Most of the participants did not want to be held back at the time they were retained, fearing they would lose their friends. However, they all exhibited resiliency as they overcame their challenges and found success in school. Examples of resiliency were viewed through the lens of the transactional model of development. The cascade of events in their lives illustrated their pathways that lead them to graduating high school with a college preparatory diploma. Many of the participants saw the benefits of retention on their academic achievement. Several viewed retention merely as prolonging their schooling. Protective factors included mother's support, family support, early academic interventions, extra-curricular activities in high school, and early grade retention.

Participants advised educators to consider all of a student's personal stories, and envision his or her future when deciding upon retention.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Educators, counselors, and psychologists have been involved in the debate regarding grade retention (i.e., being held back in school) and social promotion for decades. Educational and psychological literature have well represented proponents' and opponents' arguments about the emotional, social, and academic impact of being held back. Some studies suggested that holding a child back in school does not make up lost academic ground (Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Shepard & Smith, 1989). Other empirical studies suggested that academic losses experienced by some children may be recovered by retention (Dawson & Ott, 1991; Grant & Richardson, 1998; Katz, 2008; Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Peterson, DeGracie & Ayabe, 1985; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Greene & Winters, 2007). Some researchers said that empirical studies on retention cannot accurately claim victory on either side because methodological designs are flawed (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003; Allen, Chen, Willson, & Hughes, 2009; Mantzicopoulos, 1997.) It appears that retention does not have a clear and consistent impact on student outcomes later in life. Regardless of the evidence, the practice will likely continue as long as there are struggling learners in traditional schools with standardized curriculum to which teachers are held accountable.

The quantitative approach in the area of retention falls short of providing a complete description of the effects of retention. Patton (2002) suggested quantitative approaches may oversimplify the complexities of participants' experiences. Because quantitative studies on retention have yielded inconsistent results over time, I searched for qualitative studies to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Studies of the lived experiences of those who have been held back in elementary school may not provide consistent results, as that is not their purpose. However, they might give educators a visualization of the personal impact of retention. I located four such studies which are detailed in Chapter 2. One study involved seven elementary school students who were recently retained. One involved 12 pre-adolescent children who had been held back. One involved eight students from an alternative school and their parents. The other study involved 22 families in which at least one child was retained.

Background of the Study

Much of the quantitative literature suggested that retention has had a negative impact on the life pathways of students (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Natale, 1991; Peterson & Hughes, 2011; Reynolds, 1992). The few well-done qualitative studies that exist suggested otherwise. Some students have been retained and have successfully completed high school and were prepared for college. It is those students for whom retention was perhaps a good idea. At the very least, retention was not a corollary to their dropping out of school. For those educators faced with retention decisions, information regarding the characteristics of students whose achievement was positively affected by retention would be beneficial. Such information is gained by examining the lived experiences of students who were held back. To date, I have found no study that investigated the phenomenon from the perspectives of students who were ready to graduate from high school with a college-ready diploma.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to add to the qualitative literature in order to better understand the phenomenon of being held back from the perspective of some high school seniors with those experiences who have achieved success in school.

Research Questions

1. How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school?
2. What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school?
3. What are high school seniors' perceptions of how transactions between those environments over time shaped them into the people they are now?
4. What characteristics of resiliency, if any, did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success?

Theoretical Framework

The transactional model of development as documented by Sameroff and MacKenzie (2003) suggested that a child's development is influenced by "...the continuous dynamic interactions of the child and the experience provided by his or her social settings." The developmental process in a student is a product of the relationship between the student and his environment over time. A student is changed as he interacts and adapts with his environment. Conversely, the environment reacts to the changes in the student. Therefore, unidirectional data analysis results suggesting that retention has an effect on children should be

considered with caution.

Students and their educational contexts shape each other in a dynamic bidirectional manner over time (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). Whether they are retained or socially promoted, students' behaviors change the classroom environments and the environments change the students. The students' perception of their retention experiences influences their ability to regulate their behaviors. Conversely, the institutional context is shaped by the students' behaviors.

The transactional model of development was used to frame some quantitative studies (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). For example, Jimerson and Ferguson said, "There is a homeorhetic tendency in development such that once a pathway is enjoined, numerous factors conspire toward its' continuation" (p. 320). However, the number of variables involved in the transactions between just one student and that student's environment are countless (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003). Indeed, Sameroff (2011) indicated that an enjoined pathway is not inevitable. He further stated that no factor is deterministic, but influenced by what happens next. Thus, the transactional model of development poses challenges for any quantitative study that compares groups of students. For this reason, more qualitative studies which examine individual students' perceptions of their transactions are warranted.

Delimitations

This study occurred between May and December of 2012. Only high school students from school districts in Western North Carolina who were on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma participated in the study. Students who

were retained in schools where I served as principal were not eligible for the study.

Definition of Terms

Academic success: Unless otherwise defined, this term refers to being on grade level. Being on grade level in any school is determined by the state standards and measured by formative assessments and benchmark assessments.

Developmental cascades: Early changes in functioning in one area impact later functioning in other areas over time (Kouros, Cummings, & Davies, 2010).

Gateways: State examinations in math and reading required to be promoted to the next grade level, established in 2000 and abolished in 2010 in North Carolina. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010).

Resiliency: This term is used to describe a child's adaptation in the face of severe stress and/or the child's ability to rebound to the pre-stress level. (Steinhauer, 1996).

Retention: In this study, the term refers to the practice of requiring a student to repeat a grade (Sandoval & Hughes, 1981).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study, a background for the study, a problem statement, including research questions, and a theoretical framework which guided the inquiry process. Also, delimitations and operational definitions are provided.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. The volume of quantitative research, opinion papers, and other studies is voluminous. Therefore, the literature has been funneled to that which most appropriately informs this study. Applications

of the theoretical framework are discussed, and literature related to the characteristics and processes of resiliency are presented.

Chapter 3 describes the pilot studies and the methodology for this study. Also, it includes a description of the participants.

Chapter 4 presents and displays the data. Data include themes that emerged from interviews, direct quotes which illustrate the themes, and information from school records and social history inventories. An executive summary is included at the beginning of the chapter.

Chapter 5 presents a summary and a discussion of the results. Also, it provides implications for practice.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Practice of Retention

The practice of grade retention is one indicator of the *Condition of Education* as reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2010). Since 1996, the percentage of students in the United States who have ever been held back between the kindergarten and eighth grade has remained around 10% every year. According to NCES, public schools retain more often than private, boys are held back more often than girls, and more Black students are retained than students of other races. Also, poor children from mothers with less than a high school education have a greater chance of being held back than non or near poor children with educated mothers, and more children are retained in the South than any other region of the United States.

Some researchers claim that retention is a means by which academic standards are raised (Shepard & Smith, 1990). Indeed, statewide policies in Texas, North Carolina, and Florida have mandated retention in elementary school for students who have not exhibited proficiency levels on state tests. In 2002, the implementation of the Florida Pupil Progression Plan resulted in the retention of almost 22,000 third graders (Powell, 2005). Earlier, the Texas Reading Initiative, enacted in 1997, called for the non promotion of third graders who did not pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (Rodriguez, 2007). Up until October of 2010, The North Carolina Department of Education (NCDPI) required student accountability gateways. The gateways required students in grades three, five, and eight to pass the State End of Grade (EOG) tests in math and reading in order to be

promoted to the next grade. According to NCDPI, the gateways did not make a significant difference in the promotion or retention patterns in schools. The ten-year old policy was replaced by practices that emphasize early diagnostic assessments which help educators detect problems before the end of the school year (NCDPI, 2010).

Some scholars contend that retention is a by-product of an increasingly demanding educational system (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). The Common Core Standards (2013) address the call for a more rigorous curriculum. Currently, 45 states have adopted the Common Core Standards which were created to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs. Also, they were informed by top performing school systems in other countries. According to Hernandez-Tutop, educators face increased pressure to ensure their students meet these rigorous standards. When students do not demonstrate proficiency, the tendency is to retain them.

While some policies exist, retention is most often a school-based decision made for individual students. For example, the Student Success Initiative of 1999, which was established in Texas, mandated local decision making for the promotion or non-promotion of students in selected grades. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) created committees of educators called Grade Placement Committees. The Grade Placement Committees were to use state guidelines to make promotion or retention decisions in accordance with the Student Success Initiative. However, the Grade Placement Committees most often promoted students after the students failed

the high-stakes tests (Rodriguez, 2007).

Generally, the decision to promote or retain is determined by the child's achievement information (Peterson & Hughes, 2011). Rather than reacting to a government policy, those involved in the decision to retain a student do so with the intent to increase achievement for that particular child. The student, the student's teacher, and the student's parents or guardians are the epicenter of judgment with regard to promotion and retention. Educators such as those involved in the Texas Grade Placement Committees endeavored to make promotion and retention decisions based on what they perceived was best for individual children (Rodriguez, 2007). The challenge was using all known information to determine what was best.

Policies in Florida, Texas, and North Carolina were created to raise academic standards. Some of those policies and the politicians who created them were laying the groundwork for a national policy. For example, Texas Governor, George W. Bush, supported the Student Success Initiative, enacted in 1999. This initiative established a student accountability model mandating the passing of a state test in fifth and eighth grades in order to be promoted (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Under The Texas Education Agency (TEA), student accountability results were disaggregated according to subgroups such as ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status. It is no coincidence that the No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation, which also mandated that states report student accountability according to subgroups, was enacted during George Bush's presidency. Consequently, the educational pendulum began swinging away from social promotion and toward grade retention. However, journalists, psychologists, school officials, and other pundits bemoaned the ills of

holding a child back in school. Decades of literature are replete with a continuum of suggestions. Empirical studies reveal inconsistent results, however. Perhaps the results were inconsistent because of the vast number of variables possessed by the participants and the multitude of different contexts in which students were retained and promoted. The following literature is focused on the retention debate plus developmental theory as it relates to children and schooling.

Grade Retention and Academic Achievement

Negative outcomes. Many quantitative studies concluded that grade retention had a negative effect on later academic achievement (Alexander, 1996; Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Dennebaum & Kuhlberg, 1994; Deschamps, 1992; Hagborg, Massella, Palladino, & Shepardson, 1991; Johnson, Merrell, & Stover, 1990; Meisels & Liaw, 1993; Jimerson, 2001). Holmes and Matthews (1983) found that academic achievement improved in the first year students were retained, but the gains disappeared after two or three years. Their meta analysis included 44 studies dating from 1929 to 1981, 18 of which were published. The studies compared groups of elementary and junior high students who were retained with groups of students who were promoted. They found that the promoted group scored at .37 standard deviation units higher than the retained group. Of the 44 studies, academic achievement was a dependent variable in 31 of them. The promoted groups scored at an average of .44 standard deviation units higher than the retained group. Of the 44 studies, 18 used matched groups. Of those 18 studies, three matched social economic status and 12 matched IQ.

An updated meta-analysis was completed by Holmes (1986) a few years later

to include an additional 19 recent studies. Forty-seven of those studies measured academic achievement comparing retained groups of students to promoted students. The retained groups scored .19 standard deviation units lower than the promoted groups. Holmes categorized the studies into two sets. One set of studies compared groups of students after they had completed their retained year to groups of same-age students at the end of their promoted year. The students in the second group had been exposed to content that was one year more advanced than the retained group. The retained group, who had not been exposed to the advanced material, scored .45 standard deviation units lower than the control group.

Holmes' (1986) other set of studies compared groups of students who were in the same grade, some of whom were retained in that grade. Details of the achievement levels of students in the control groups were not given. Those studies indicated that the retained students outperformed the control groups. However, the achievement gains were short lived. Three years later, both groups of students' evened out, showing no difference between the groups.

Grissom and Shepard (1989) stated that a causal connection might have existed between retention and dropping out of school. Their study included four large school districts with varying levels of affluence and ethnicity. The study included data for students who were over-age for their grade, as well as data for students whose records indicated that they were retained at some point in their academic careers. Because of how the sample was defined, no data for the grade levels at which the students were retained were available. According to Grissom and Shepard, elementary grade retentions had to be inferred from age. It is possible that

most of the retentions in their sample occurred at the junior high and high school levels. All of the verified retentions occurred between grades six and twelve.

Grissom and Shepard (1989) stated that retention contributed to dropping out of school in a way that was distinct from poor achievement. However, it appeared that statistical calculations to compare the relationship between retention and achievement were incomplete. In one school district sample, the authors stated the coefficient from retention to dropping out was .34 and the coefficient for achievement to dropping out was -.22. Data for the other three school districts were available for the retention-to-dropping out coefficients. Those stated coefficients were .29, .17, and .18. However, achievement-to-dropping out coefficients for the other three school districts were not available. According to Creswell (2008), correlations below .35 show only a slight statistical relationship.

Grissom and Shepard (1989) stated that they attempted to create internal validity by including as many achievement scores as possible for each student. Some students' records contained test scores for one year, but most of the students' records contained test scores for more than one school year. Yet all of the scores were standardized and averaged. It appears that the achievement data from this study were as non-specific as the retention data.

Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) followed students from early elementary school through 11th grade to determine the association between grade retention and academic achievement during adolescence. They categorized the students four ways. One group ($n=47$) was placed in a transition grade between kindergarten and first grade. Another group ($n=15$) was recommended for the transition grade, but

were promoted. The third group ($n=27$) was the group who were held back in first, second, or third grade. The fourth group ($n=44$) was a stratified random sample of promoted students. There was some attrition associated with the samples due to students moving out of the school district or dropping out. However, those students remained a part of the sample as long as they were in the school district.

This study showed that a random sample of promoted students outperformed retained students and students who were recommended for retention but promoted. By 11th grade, the promoted students' academic mean was reported as 66.91. The transition grade group mean was 55.42, the recommended for transition group mean was 55.25, and the retained group mean was 56.27. While not pointed out by the authors, it appears that over time, the retained group outperformed a similar group that was not retained.

Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) made it clear that retention should not be considered as the only contributing factor leading to poor academic achievement. According to these researchers, retention in and of itself has been the result of a confluence of individual characteristics in a child's life which include achievement, social and emotional adaptability, and family support. In this study, the authors used a series of analysis of covariance models to adjust for initial differences in the groups. However, there was no attempt to match subjects across multiple variables, especially pre- and post-retention characteristics beyond achievement and aggression, such as family support, mother's education, or other traits. While Jimerson and Ferguson's statistical adjustments may be appropriate given the sample, Alexander et al. (2003) criticized this method because some relevant

variable could have been ignored.

In an earlier study, Jimerson et al. (2002) reviewed 17 papers and concluded that retention emerged as one of the more prominent factors contributing to students dropping out of school. One of the papers was Grissom and Shepard (1989). Jimerson et al. described this study by saying, "...it was found that retention was the most significant predictor for high school dropout for these students" (p. 443). Most of the studies from this review claimed that being held back in school was a strong predictor of dropping out.

Using seven meta-analyses as a basis for his research, four of which were conducted by the same researcher, Hattie (2009) recommended against retaining students. He said, "...the overwhelming evidence is negative – plus the equity effects – four times the chances of being held back if African American or Hispanic should be damning in itself." He described retention as more of the same, and suggested that, instead of more, struggling students need "different." Regarding the inconsistency of empirical evidence, he cautioned against an "over-zealous critique of method" (Hattie, 2013)

Positive outcomes. A meta-analysis of studies that matched subjects between comparison groups tended to show that retained students fared as well as or better on achievement than matched students who were socially promoted (Allen, et al., 2009). Pierson and Connell (1992) found that retained students' academic performance was significantly better than a matched group of socially promoted students. This study examined students in grades three through six one year after the retained students had been held back. The sample contained four groups of students:

a group of students who were retained, a group of matched socially promoted students, a matched-ability group of students in the same grade as the retained students, and a stratified random sample of non-retained students who were matched to the retained sample by sex and grade.

Studies in the meta-analysis authored by Allen et al. (2009) have been held to criticism for the inadequate use of controls for pre-retention differences for retained students. In spite of the negative results, and perhaps because of the inadequate controls, one study showed some positive results of retention. Ferguson, Jimerson, and Dalton (2001) followed 106 students from kindergarten through 11th grade, 58 of whom were retained, 15 promoted but recommended for retention, and a random sample of 33 who were regularly promoted. They found that 25% of the retained students performed above the mean of promoted students in 7th grade GPA and 8th grade SAT.

It appears that studies showing the positive effects of retention tended to focus more on why some retained students were successful rather than comparing groups of retained students to other groups. For example, a study from Ohio showed 138 of 966 students enrolled in one high school had been retained some time in their educational career (Kosiba, 2008). Ninety-eight percent of those retentions occurred before high school. Of the 138 students who were retained, 106 were academically successful. Kosiba defined academic success in terms of passing scores on the Ohio Achievement Test and the Ohio Graduation Test. Factors exhibiting a correlation to success for those retained students included early retention, good discipline, both parents in the home, and a low number of tardies.

Similarly, Sandoval and Hughes (1981) found that some students benefited from retention. They monitored 146 first grade candidates for retention to determine the effects of retention upon their social, emotional, and academic development after one year. Some of the students were promoted and some were retained. The primary purpose of the study was to examine the characteristics of the children who benefited from retention. The authors found that retained students' academic success was dependent upon their self concept and the confidence level of the initial first grade teacher in the decision to retain. A good predictor of a retained child's social progress was their positive relationship with their teacher. The classroom setting played an important role in a retained student's success. The more individualized instruction that occurred in the classroom, the more likely it was that a retained child experienced success.

As stated above, the purpose of the Sandoval and Hughes (1981) study was not to measure the difference between retained students and promoted students. However, they categorized the students into four groups for comparison: promoted students, retained students who were successful, retained students who were moderately successful, and retained students who were not successful. They found there was no significant difference in the reading achievement between promoted students and successfully retained students. However, mathematics achievement was different. The promoted group outperformed all groups of retained students. The authors noted that the successfully retained students were in the top third of their first grade classes. There was no mention of the quality of math instruction.

Alexander et al. (2003) examined children's academic performance over a

period of eight years to evaluate the consequences of grade retention in a Baltimore school system. Repeaters' post-retention performances were compared against four groups: their own performance before they were retained, the performance of other students who were not retained but had similar academic records in primary grades, performance of all never-retained students, and the performance of students who were held back after the comparison was made. The last group allows the comparison of the performance of second grade children who were retained in first grade, for example, against the performance of students not retained until third grade. The authors analyzed the data after excluding students who withdrew from the school system, students in special education at any time of the study, and students who repeated a grade more than once during any time in the study. Gains from the fall of the repeated year to the end of the students' 7th grade were calculated. First grade repeaters did not catch up to the never-retained group or the comparison group. However, the second grade repeaters made the same gains as the never-retained group and made slightly more gains in achievement than the comparison group. The third grade repeaters made more gains in achievement than did the never-retained group and the comparison group. Alexander et al. concluded that students who were retained generally maintained their pace of academic achievement over the same years better than students who were never retained.

Examining achievement of retained students over time appears to find more benefits of retention than comparing retained students with non-retained students. Schwerdt and West (2012) studied the effects of third grade retention on student outcomes up to six years later. These third grade students were retained because

they did not pass the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, a 2002 legislative mandate in Florida. They found evidence of substantial short-term gains in math and reading achievement. Also, they found that third grade retention “substantially reduces the probability of being retained in later grades...” (p. 26).

Qualitative Findings

Four qualitative studies yielded insight into the lived experiences of those affected by retention. Three studies captured students’ perceptions; one documented parents’ and students’ philosophies of retention. While qualitative research is not designed to measure the effectiveness of retention, it can yield some observations regarding the practice.

Anderson and West (1992) studied 22 families who experienced retention of at least one child within the family. The intent of the study was to discern the retention philosophies of parents and of the students who were retained. Generally, both parents and students described retention as a justifiable educational practice when grade level material is not mastered. Also, parents and students in the study indicated that retention benefited the retainees in terms of providing them a better chance for success in school.

Tweed (2001) interviewed 12 pre-adolescent children who had been retained. She captured the voices of these children as they responded to questions in four categories: perceptions of the retention decision, the students’ perceptions of others regarding their retention experience, their concerns, and the impact of the retention experience on their self-perception. Generally, the students’ statements contradicted the findings in the literature that opposes retention. The students said that they felt

more successful in school as a result of being held back.

Fournier (2009) interviewed eight teenagers from an alternative school and their parents. Some of the students had been retained more than once. Contradictory to the findings in the literature that opposes retention, those students stated that their academic performance improved as a result of being retained. However, most of the participants in this study experienced negative reactions of the retention event. Both Fournier and Tweed (2001) relied solely on interviews for data sources. They did not include pre-retention and post-retention achievement data which may have served to triangulate the interview data.

Kershaw's (2009) qualitative study included interview data from seven elementary school students shortly after each had experienced retention. She concluded that retention lead to the marginalization of the students and further drove them to the lower echelons of society. This study appeared to contain construct validity errors as the conclusions seemed to be inconsistent with her data. Construct validity refers to truthfully labeling observations (Trochim, 2006). Some of the observations noted in Kershaw's study appeared to be mislabeled.

Transactions Between the Child and The Environment

There exists a variety of contexts in which children are influenced (Sameroff, 2009). One of the more powerful contexts is the relationship between children and their parents. A change in dynamics in any such relationship can influence behaviors for all involved. Sameroff and MacKenzie (2003) described a model of intervention that elicited perceptual changes between children and their parents that lead to interactional differences. Behavioral changes in the children through

remediation brought about differences in how the parents perceived their children. The parents' new perceptions, which were more positive, redefined the children for the parents, which in turn, changed the way parents interacted with their children over time.

Psycho-social interventions can take many forms. Bukowski, Laursen, and Hoza (2010) studied withdrawn children and how the cascading effects over time would create a trajectory for increased withdrawal and depression. They monitored 131 upper elementary-age students, 85% of whom participated in three assessments from May of the first year of the study to May of the next year. The students were categorized into five groups based on their levels of avoidance and exclusion as a measure for depression. The students described as avoidant and excluded without participating in a mutual friendship exhibited increased levels of depression within the time frame of the study. However, participation in a friendship changed the trajectory for other students who were also avoidant and excluded, ultimately minimizing the effects of depression. The intervention of friendship altered the original pathway of depression and sadness for those students.

Bidirectional interplay between middle school students' emotional well being and academic motivation can be connected to their success or failure in school (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998). This study suggested a transactional process between students' perceptions of their competence and the history of feedback from teachers. In turn, the students' self perceptions affected their sense of well being. According to Sutherland and Oswald (2005), the transactional model applied to the educational context can be used to analyze how changes in a student's behavior

affect the teacher's behavior and how the difference in the teacher's behavior can further impact the student. An academic intervention may improve a student's achievement minimally in the short term, but the improvement may serve to positively impact how teachers relate to this student. Over time, the slight academic improvement, because of the transactions between the student and her educational context, could result in improved academic achievement.

The association between academic achievement, sociopathic tendencies, and depression was the focus of a longitudinal study (Masten & Roisman, 2005). The conduct domain (defined by rule-abiding or rule-breaking behaviors) was shown to predict academic achievement in the early years. However, academic achievement was not found to predict conduct. Nevertheless, the authors suggested that changes in one domain can set off a cascade of events that have developmental implications over time. Interventions often alter the progressions of such pathways.

Developmental cascade theory can provide a framework for illustrating a child's transactions between the academic and social environments. Developmental cascades are "the cumulative consequences for development of the many interactions and transactions occurring in developing systems that result in spreading effects across levels, among domains at the same level, and across different systems or generations" (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010, p. 491). Interventions often interrupt negative cascades and initiate a more positive pathway.

The interaction between parental perceptions and a child's academic achievement is further supported by parent training in one study in Oregon (Patterson, Forgatch, & DeGarmo, 2010). By altering the family environments of

single mothers and their school-age sons through preventive intervention, researchers were able to see a decrease in antisocial behaviors and academic problems of the children. The changes in the children's improvement sparked positive changes in how the mothers perceived their sons.

Resiliency in Children

To gain an understanding of how struggling learners who experienced academic setbacks managed to persevere, it is important to examine the concept of resiliency. The transactional model and resulting developmental cascades can form a conceptual framework for resiliency.

Supposing a child is a product of his environmental and biological transactions, then what factors and/or interventions must exist for the child to develop resiliency? First, it is necessary to define resiliency. Steinhauer (1996) used this term to describe a child's adaptation in the face of severe stress and/or the child's ability to rebound to the pre-stress level. Resiliency may be defined as a product of interventions to interrupt negative pathways (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). It is these interventions about which educators are most concerned in order to facilitate resiliency among struggling students. In the past twenty years, the term has evolved. Brown and Brown (2006) described resiliency as a "normative part of human development, a trait existing naturally to some degree in nearly all people" (p. 27). Perhaps because risks to early development and later opportunities for all children have existed for decades (Dent & Cameron, 2003), society has come to accept and expect resiliency as a part of life.

The reason some children exhibit more resiliency than others involves

complex transactions between protective factors and risk factors (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Several authors agree on a number of protective factors (Rutter, 1987; Spekman, Goldberg, & Herman, 1993; Werner, 1993; Haggerty, Sherrod, Garnezy, & Rutter, 1994;). Protective factors include biological characteristics, such as good health and temperament. Psychological and sociological protective competencies include affective behavior, good problem-solving abilities, an internal locus of control, and being good natured. According to Woklow and Ferguson (2001), resilient children tend to be active, good natured, and affectionate. This makes them more likely to get the support they need from their social environments such as school, family, and peers. Resilient children tend to foster trusting relationships with adults. As trusting relationships are formed, support systems are created for the children. Henderson (1998) found several traits that resilient children have in common. Children who are resilient tend to think of others and are less self-centered than non-resilient children. They often give of themselves to others or support a cause. In addition, resilient children exhibit personal competence. In other words, they are good at something.

Environmental protective factors are said to be warm, supportive parents or at least one supportive adult (Steinhauer, 1996; Janas, 2002). Environmental protective factors in children were illustrated by Brooks and Goldstein (2001). As defined by the authors, resiliency allows a child “to deal more effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to bounce back from disappointments, adversity, and trauma, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to relate comfortably with others, and to treat oneself and others with

respect” (p. 1). Brooks and Goldstein suggested that parents identify and reinforce their children’s strengths. In so doing, the parents would be giving their children power to confront and overcome their difficulties.

The notion that resiliency can be nurtured was discussed by Linquanti (1992). He suggested that environmental protective factors should be emphasized over “fixing kids’ behaviors” (p. 10). Children are not responsible for becoming resilient. Instead, adults should facilitate the natural resilient tendencies in children by providing support, having high expectations, and giving children opportunities to engage in meaningful activities.

In addition to the lack of protective factors, risk factors include innate vulnerability to challenges, anxiety, and stress (Grotberg, 1996). Steinhauer (1996) pointed to a number of environmental and biological risk factors that undermine the development of resiliency. Poverty creates environmental stressors that limit resources and magnify interpersonal problems. Other environmental risk factors include transience or high family mobility, neglectful or abusive parents, and changing economic patterns. Biological risk factors include low birth weight and the infant’s low threshold of response to unfamiliarity and change. According to Steinhauer (1996), children who avoid new or stressful situations do not adequately develop effective coping strategies. In addition, Chess (1989) found that, while biological factors that impede the development of resiliency later in life differ from individual to individual, temperament at age three and parental conflict were significantly correlated to resiliency outcome in early adult life.

The presence or absence of most protective factors resides outside the

boundaries of influence. However, some processes can be promoted or manipulated. These hold special significance for educators. For the purposes of this discussion, three general psychological processes that may be manipulated will be examined to explain resiliency. They are attachment, purposeful parenting, and perceived school success.

The processes of resiliency. Several cognitive domains might explain the processes of resiliency. For the purposes of this study, three domains are illustrated.

Attachment theory. Originally described by Bowlby (1953), attachment can be linked to feelings of self confidence. He believed children naturally seek closeness to their care givers for physical and emotional comfort, and ultimately, survival. Main and Cassidy (1988) found that children who experienced positive relationships with their care givers were more likely to exhibit positive self esteem. Shaver and Mikulincer (2010) cited seminal research in attachment theory by explaining that a secure parental attachment is the foundation for personal growth and exploratory behavior in children. Children who felt loved by their caregivers were free to explore their environments, enjoy learning, and develop autonomy. They were more likely to pursue goals and realize their aspirations. Shaver and Mikulincer suggested that the same processes may occur in the educational setting.

It appears that secure attachments are linked to positive school adaptation for children. In an earlier study, Cowan, Cowan, and Mehta (2009) found a correlation between parents' working models of attachment and their children's early school adaptation. More specifically, the mothers' insecure adult attachment was directly connected to their low level of authoritative parenting which was linked to their

children's high levels of externalizing and internalizing behaviors, as well as low academic achievement in first grade.

Any given school classroom will have children from a continuum of attachments ranging from strong to non-existent. Since schools cannot mediate a child's attachment at home during his or her formative years, what can teachers do to counter balance the insecure attachments formed at home? Teachers can make up the difference. Buyse, Verschueren, and Doumen (2009) found that high quality teacher-child relationships in preschool could protect insecurely attached children against the risk of aggressive behavior. The authors concluded that a high degree of closeness between teachers and individual students could buffer against risk created by weak attachment to mothers. By being highly responsive to children in providing comfort, reassurance, and encouragement, teachers can improve a child's ability to form close relationships and build trust.

Purposeful parenting. Decades of literature have captured a relationship between parenting style and later developmental outcomes for children (Kraemer, 1997; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998). Children whose parents were both demanding and responsive toward their children exhibited social responsibility and self confidence (Baumrind, 1993; Cesarone, 1999). Dent and Cameron (2003) used the word "authoritative" to define the parenting style that contributed most to developing resiliency among children. Authoritative parents exhibited high levels of expectations for their children balanced with high levels of responsiveness and care. They encouraged two-way communication and recognized their children's points of view. According to Osborne (1990), parenting contributed more than any other

factor regarding the probability that a socially-disadvantaged child achieved competency. Osborne's study showed that children's resiliency could be attributed to parents' pervasive positive attitudes toward their children "as expressed in a non-authoritarian approach to life and their interest and involvement in their child's education." (p. 45). In this context, Osborne's use of "authoritarian" differed from the meaning as expressed by Dent and Cameron.

Success in school. Dent and Cameron (2003) stated that success in school is a crucial protective factor in determining adult life styles and ensuring positive social inclusion for at risk students. Parental attitude toward education is the child's first exposure to academic success. Osborne (1990) found that children who were read to frequently and whose parents were moderately or very interested in their children's education were more likely to have resilient characteristics.

School can be a refuge for students who experience stressors at home, especially if the students are academically inclined. To illustrate this notion, two studies found that school success lead to resiliency among some children (Roberts, 2003; Schnur, 1998). Being successful in school and perceiving school success were shown to be predictive factors for resiliency among rising middle school students (Roberts, 2003). Resilient students had more favorable perceptions of school than non-resilient students. Conversely, Robertson (2001) found that resilient characteristics predicted academic achievement among low income elementary school students. It appeared that resiliency and school success were associated. Whether resiliency predicts school success or school success predicts resiliency, the implications for educators would seem to be significant.

Discussions regarding school success may not be complete without including research findings on dropouts. Some literature suggests a correlation between non-academic functions and staying in school (Beck & Muia, 1980; Pittman, 1986; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Pittman, 1991). Non-academic functions include relationships with the family, relationships with teachers, and social integration.

Beck and Muia (1980) found that the primary characteristic of a high school dropout was an unsatisfactory relationship with his family. Communication with parents was minimal and parent expectations regarding school performance was low. A majority of dropouts studied had parents who possessed indifferent or negative attitudes regarding the value of education.

Pittman and Haughwout (1987) suggested school climate was a contributing factor for students deciding to stay in school. One component of school climate is the interaction with teachers. Favorite teachers were defined by some high school students as those helped them, were nice to them, and who were concerned about them. To fill the void created by unhappy homes, Beck and Muia (1980) recommended that educators demonstrate love and approval toward students who exhibit characteristics of dropping out of school. As students feel valued by their teachers, they are likely to realize an expectation of staying in school (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987).

Students who are satisfied with school and identify with school are more likely to stay in school (Pittman, 1991). School identification stems from social integration within the school setting. Peer interaction contributes to social integration, and students interact with peers via extracurricular activities. Pittman

and Haughwout (1987) noticed a decreased number of dropouts in those students who participated in extracurricular activities. The transactions between social integration and academic integration were evident in Pittman's (1986) study. He wrote, "...the level of social integration influences and in turn is influenced by the degree of academic integration." (p. 12). He further suggested that an increase in academic integration would occur as the level of social integration increases.

A transactional model of development that includes a resiliency cascade event has implications for a wide range of positive developmental outcomes, especially for children at risk (Werner, 1986). A balance of power between the child and her educational and social contexts can be restored by increasing the protective factors of resiliency and providing a positive school climate.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Creswell (2007) explained that a phenomenological approach in qualitative research is utilized when "...it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon...to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (p. 60). The purpose of this study was to describe how successful high school seniors viewed their experiences with being held back in elementary school. I reconstructed their academic, social, and home environments at the time they were retained. I investigated the transactions between them and their environments that may have enabled them to rebound from any adverse effects from the retention event. From their perspectives, I added to the retention literature with a focus on the experiences of those who successfully finished high school and planned to attend college.

Role of Researcher

As an elementary school principal who has retained several students, it was necessary for me to acknowledge and bracket (Creswell, 2007) my experiences with retention. I endeavored to set aside notions I developed through the years regarding the effects of retention. I have been biased toward retention as a means of successful intervention toward improved academic achievement when students are not ready to matriculate to the next grade. Researcher bias may compromise reliability in any qualitative study (Hill et al., 2005); therefore, I made an effort to remain objective.

Whether or not the literature favors retention or social promotion, it would not be in the best interest of the child for us to make retention decisions based on statistical evidence alone. Instead, the factors contributing to each child's situation

should be considered (Lieberman, 1980). I have witnessed the harmful effects of social promotion and am ultimately concerned about the value of a standard high school diploma. I know that retention should be considered with extreme caution; however, there are times when it may be right for some children. I want to hear from those “children.” My role in this study was to encourage participants to tell their stories.

As a school administrator, I have a vested interest in understanding the profile of a student who might benefit from being retained. Retention surveys such as Light (1998) provided limited insight into the predicted success of retention. Lieberman (1980) weighed retention versus non-retention for several factors in his decision-making model for retention. Those factors included the child’s physical size, maturity, academic potential, basic skill competencies, and self concept, as well as the child’s parents’ and school’s attitudes toward retention. While these resources may be helpful, voices of students who were held back provided deeper insights into the effects of retention.

I expected to be changed by this study and I was. I became immersed in the data and felt the impact that the retention experience had on each participant. I was moved by their stories of embarrassment, how they overcame significant barriers, and how each of them discussed their dreams. I have been concerned by accounts in the literature that blame the instructional process and teachers themselves for retaining students. As a school administrator, I found the process of this study enabled me to make decisions and inform policies that help students succeed rather than ensure their failure.

Qualitative researchers must “place the world out of action while remaining bracketed” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). In the interest of promoting trustworthiness, I attempted to set aside my predilections, predispositions, and my experiences regarding retention. I was able to participate in each interview with fresh eyes, and the reflexivity with which I responded to participants’ answers enabled me to delve deeply into their experiences and perceptions.

Pilot Studies

Retention report for high school graduates. At the request of my supervisor, in June, 2010, I examined high school graduates’ cumulative folders from our school district to determine which students were held back in elementary school. Only graduates with elementary records available for examination were included. Also, only students who graduated in June, 2010 were included in this examination. Those not included in this search were graduates with incomplete or unavailable elementary records and those students who graduated after summer school. Seventy-two of the 630 graduates, or 11.43%, were retained in elementary school. Some research on students who were retained and graduated suggested that elementary school retention may have helped some students (Kosiba, 2008). At the very least, it did not lead these students to drop out of school. In fact, of the 72 graduating seniors in the class of 2010 who were retained in elementary school, 19 of them earned the most rigorous diploma, the College/University Preparatory Diploma. Compared to the national average of 10% students retained yearly, this snapshot of one cohort from one school district may suggest retention did no harm, and it might have helped toward graduation.

Pilot qualitative study. The purpose of the pilot study was to describe how five high school seniors viewed their experiences with being held back in elementary school. The study took place in the fall of 2010. For this pilot study, which was under the approval of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board, I used criterion sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) to select all participants. Criterion sampling included participants who met certain conditions which was useful for quality assurance. For this study, I interviewed high school seniors, on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma, who had been retained in elementary school. I did not include students who had been placed in Special Education. Some students are held back in school before it is discovered that they have a learning disability. At the time of the pilot study, I reasoned that the retention event should center on underachievement not associated with a learning disability. Also, I excluded students who attended any elementary school during the time when I served as their principal.

Three of the five participants indicated that retention was good for them. One senior said “it was good and bad.” Making better decisions and “knowing more” were some of the stated results of being in school one year longer. The pilot study enabled me to realize that I needed to probe deeper to understand the transactions between the students and their contexts over time. Also, their stories revealed character traits that lead me to study resiliency.

The pilot study served as a springboard for the dissertation study. I became fascinated with the extensive literature regarding retention, transactions between environments, and resiliency. I used what I learned from the literature to determine

how environmental transactions and resiliency may have effected each student's development. From the dissertation study, I found a broader sample and more contact with the participants yielded a deeper understanding about high school senior's perspectives of being held back in elementary school.

Research Design

Most of the retention research has been quantitative. I contend that that the phenomenon is far too complex to discern quantitatively. To understand retention at a deep level, the lived experiences of those who were held back a grade warranted further study. Considering that my audience will likely be other elementary school educators, I chose a qualitative design to help us see into the future of our struggling students.

Sample

Criterion sampling involves the selection of participants who meet certain conditions, and it is useful for quality assurance (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This type of purposeful sampling is guided by the theoretical framework of the study. I searched for transactions between the participants and their environments that precipitated certain developmental cascades that may have led to their resiliency.

Because my pilot study sample of five did not yield enough data for saturation, I realized that an increase in sample size was necessary. Mason's (2010) research of 560 qualitative studies across 30 methodological approaches showed a mean of 19.9 single interviews were used in phenomenological studies to reach data saturation. Using Mason as a guide, I planned to include 20 participants who were high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma. I found

22 students who met the criteria and one other student who delayed entering school in Europe. I did not include any data from the pilot study.

Due to the high level of homogeneity among the sample, I thought it possible that the data could be saturated sooner than the 20th interview (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). However, consistent with Mason's (2010) study, I decided to interview at least 20 participants within the time frame of this study. Saturation became evident as consistent themes and patterns occurred (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

During the research design phase of this study, I chose to include students with disabilities if they were among the pool of candidates who meet the graduation and diploma criteria. This is modified from my pilot study. My reason for not excluding them is that if they were on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma, then it is reasonable to assume they successfully compensated for their disabilities. Of the 22 participants, 14 received special education services in school.

Participant selection. After approval from the Western Carolina University's Institutional Review Board and the superintendents of the school districts from which I drew my sample, I contacted high school principals. I spoke with those principals or their designees and their counselors to explain the study and suggest ways they might find students who meet the criteria for selection. I suggested they run a birthday list from the student data base. The older students were likely candidates. Each school official used the birthday list to locate possible participants for the study. One school counselor created a survey that served as a starting point for locating participants.

The school administrators and counselors asked the students if they wanted to participate in a research study about being retained in elementary school and ultimately having a successful educational career. The school officials communicated to the students that an elementary school principal was conducting the study to find out more about the effects of being held back in elementary school. The principals and counselors told the students that the researcher wanted to hear their stories, and she wanted their advice about what to consider when facing the retention decision. I cautioned the counselors about selecting the participants. Instead, I asked them to suggest names of all students who were interested in participating in the study.

Informed consent. The high school counselors obtained consent (Appendix A) from the students to give their names to me. All of the students were 18 or older, therefore, I did not need to obtain parent consent and student assent. Then the counselors assisted me in making arrangements to meet the students. From there, I disseminated informed consent forms (Appendix B) and explained the study to each student. Seidman (1998) stated that participants should be given full opportunity to know everything about the study and the researcher. Therefore, I encouraged the participants to ask questions about the study. However, few of them asked any questions. In addition, I informed them about possible risks and rewards associated with being a part of this study.

Patton (2002) suggested that researchers show how we value participants' contributions by offering something of value in exchange. As an incentive to participate in the study, I offered each participant \$20 for taking part in the study.

Two of the participants hesitated taking the money, but did so at my encouragement. Confidentiality was kept by changing the students' names and by not identifying the school districts and high schools in which the students were enrolled.

Participants. Of the 22 participants, nine were male, three of whom were white, three were black, one was bi-racial, and two were Latino. All but two males received special education services in school. Of the 13 female participants, 11 were white and two were black. Six female participants received special education services in school and one was in the AIG (Academically and Intellectually Gifted) program. Sixteen were retained in the same school system in which they graduated. Four were retained in a different North Carolina school system from which they graduated. Two were retained in a different state other than North Carolina. Of the 22 participants, 19 were held back in the primary grades (grades kindergarten through third grade.)

Data Collection

Using a topical approach (Marshall and Rossman, 2011), I interviewed each participant individually. I created the interview protocol based on Seidman's (1998) three-interview approach. Seidman suggested that the first interview focus on the participant's history with the experience. The second interview should allow the participant to express how the phenomenon impacts current experiences. The third interview should give the participant an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the experience, how the participant has made sense of the phenomenon. Due to time constraints, I conducted one interview which included all the components of Seidman's three-interview approach (against Seidman's advice.) However, I

extended interviews for a few participants who possessed rich context. The list of interview questions is located in Appendix C. Most of the interviews occurred in borrowed offices in the student's school. However, some participants agreed to meet me at my office. I interviewed one student at her grandmother's home. Each interview was digitally recorded using two devices. I personally transcribed each interview.

Consistent with Marshall and Rossman's (2011, p. 19) phenomenological approach, I attempted to explore each individual's meaning of their lived experience with retention - how they perceived it, described it, felt about it, judged it, remembered it, made sense of it, and talked about it with others. I tried to deepen the discussions by asking each participant to "tell me what it was like to be retained in elementary school." I asked probing questions such as "When did you first understand that you were being held back?" "How did you feel when you first learned that you were going to be held back?" "Why were you retained?" "What was your parent's view of retention?" "What was your teacher's view?" "Describe your first days of school as you entered the grade for the second time." "How was the second time around different than the first?" "Now that you are about to graduate from high school, reflect upon how being retained affected your academic achievement." "Knowing what you know now, would you have changed anything regarding your retention? If so, in what way?" By asking their advice for educators, I wanted to empower the participants and make them feel as though they were contributing to effective educational practices. This part of the interview gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their meaning of being held back. They

often couched their responses in terms of their own experiences. In several cases, they reversed their initial responses regarding the impact retention had on their education. In addition to recording the interviews, I took notes. During the interviews I read over my notes to determine what responses needed to be clarified or probed.

I asked each participant to share their academic histories, such as grades, report cards, test scores, awards, and mementos. These artifacts added another dimension to each participant's story. One participant sent to me an excerpt from a book she was writing. In addition to the interviews and artifacts, I asked each participant to complete a social history survey (Appendix D). Results from this survey determined household income, education of parents, school transitions, and family configurations of the participants. These additional data sources served as a means of triangulation. From all of the data sources, I hoped to be able to pinpoint certain developmental cascades and resiliency characteristics.

I personally transcribed each interview, and I member checked by sending the transcription to the participant for corrections, additions and deletions. I received responses regarding the transcriptions from two participants. After completing each transcription, I thoroughly read through each transcription and wrote memos in the margins. This practice enabled me to become immersed in the data, and I developed a connection with each participant through this process. I kept a journal of notes and memos to record my reflections and to inform the interviewing process. I found that my first few interviews included an excess of tangential discourse. I quickly learned to keep the participants focused on the interview protocol. I wrote vignettes about

each participant which I found helpful to remind me about who they were.

However, I decided not to use the vignettes as part of the results component of this research due to the nature of the study and my intent to protect confidentiality. As I drafted findings and discussions, I sent copies to the participants for their reflections to determine if I captured their stories in ways that were consistent with their responses. I made available a copy of the Executive Summary from Chapter 4 to each participant, principal, and counselor.

Data Analysis

After I had conducted 12 interviews and completed the transcriptions, I participated in one meeting of the Western Carolina University Qualitative Research Group. The members of the group read, coded, and discussed excerpts from two transcriptions. I compared their codes with mine and found consistency among them.

I used *Atlas.ti* software to organize the data. Upon coding 22 transcripts, I realized I had created over 150 code families. Data reduction became a fluid process. After receiving feedback from other doctoral students, I condensed some code families to make the data more manageable. From those code families, I created generic families to further categorize the data. Within the families, I was able to discern common themes. I refined the process of coding throughout the data analysis process. The final analysis yielded 812 coded responses which I organized into eight sections. All data were kept confidential; only the investigators listed on the Request for Review of Human Subjects Research form had access to confidential data.

The time frame for completing this project was 12 months. The proposal was submitted for IRB approval in the spring of 2012. Contacts with school officials took place in June, 2012 and interviews occurred between June and December, 2012. Data analysis ran concurrent with data collection so I could refine my interviewing techniques.

Discovering the themes which emerged from the data was the first challenge of the process of data analysis. Contextualizing the participants' stories in ways that illustrated the themes was the second, and greater challenge. I purposefully used all the quotes from participants if their responses exemplified a theme to avoid construct validity errors.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to add to the qualitative literature in order to better understand the phenomenon of retention from the perspective of some high school seniors with those experiences who have achieved success in school. The participants were students who had either recently graduated from high school with a college preparatory diploma or were high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma, all who were held back a grade in elementary school. They were asked to describe their experiences at the time of retention and thereafter. Included in the data are social histories of the participants and a review of school records.

Executive Summary

School facilitation was the most dominant theme emerging from the data. Almost every participant talked about receiving teacher support throughout school. In addition, most of them talked about their academic successes. A key protective factor for social integration in the school setting was their involvement in extracurricular activities, mainly sports. In general, school was a positive experience for the participants.

Most of the participants described vividly support they received from teachers. Teachers helped them by providing interventions and remediation beyond the regular classroom lessons. Half of the participants indicated they received extra help from their teachers. Although they did not mention it, more than half of the participants were in Special Education. Teachers made learning fun and relevant.

Several participants talked about having personal relationships with teachers that made them feel valued and connected them to school.

Generally, participants saw themselves as being successful in school. Some said they struggled in one content area, but were successful in another content area. Others said they struggled early, but were successful later. Several participants were involved in Advanced Placement courses or Honors courses. Two participants were working on a college degree at the same time they were in high school.

Extracurricular activities in high school appeared to be a key protective factor for school success. The only participants not involved in extracurricular activities were enrolled in college courses. Extracurricular activities most often involved sports. However, some participants were involved in theater or other clubs.

Compared to school facilitation, school barriers yielded nearly half the amount of coded responses. Almost all of the participants struggled in a core content area. About half of them struggled in mathematics; about half were struggling readers. Some participants experienced difficulty in both. Reading problems tended to improve more than math. For example, if participants struggled in math in elementary school, then they were more likely to report continued difficulty with math in later years.

Many participants said their repeating year was not much different than their first year. However, school records indicated these students received academic interventions and/or remediation during their second year in the repeated grade.

Family involvement was found to be a key protective factor for school success. Participants communicated well with their families and held their families

in high regard. Several seniors talked about family outings and events involving their families. Participants' families valued education and their parents expected success in school.

The dominant characteristic of family involvement was the mother who pushed and supported them. Mothers were most often mentioned as providing encouragement, being influential, and helping with school work. Income and education levels of mothers varied among participants, but the constant characteristic was support for their children's education. Whether the mothers were high school dropouts or college graduates, they expected their children to succeed in school.

The participants were not without family barriers. Several suffered through parents' divorce, death of a close family member, mobility, and poverty. Two participants were reared in foster homes. However, the stability of the foster homes provided the support necessary for the participants to succeed. As the participants spoke of the family difficulties, they seemed to describe them as motivating and inspirational factors rather than excuses. The family barriers paled in comparison to the network of support participants received from their families.

Interpersonal characteristics were assets to the participants' success in school. Interpersonal characteristics included the ability to make friends easily, life-long friendships, and valued relationships with peers and adults. Social integration in school activities was a result of group affiliation through friendships. If trauma from retention occurred, participants seemed to be able to minimize it with the help of friends.

As participants spoke of their sadness at being retained, they explained their sadness in terms of losing their friends. Most of their first reactions involved fear of not moving up with their friends. However, they quickly made new friends when the new school year began. For a few participants, the sadness hit most hard when they witnessed their original class graduate high school without them.

Most participants described a transformation as they identified with a new and different group of friends. As they developed new friendships, they developed new interests. The social trajectories for the participants seemed to be altered when they were held back. In general, the participants described these new pathways as positive.

Participants' character traits, defined through intrapersonal characteristics, illustrated resiliency and perseverance. Generally, they faced their fears when they were children, and they reflected a positive spin on their retention as young adults. They seemed to possess an inner strength that motivated them through failure. A few participants talked about not wanting to be held back a second time so they worked harder to succeed. Their challenges were many; however, they did not make excuses.

Every participant talked about something at which they excelled or enjoyed. Many were accomplished athletes, some were honor students. Others were musicians or actors. All of them had a skill or interest that gave them confidence in themselves.

Most of the intrapersonal challenges faced by the participants were fears of being embarrassed by being held back. They seemed to anticipate being outwardly

humiliated by the experience, but that did not occur. A few participants talked about their inner humiliation when they were retained. However, they seemed to have moved past those feelings as they matriculated through school.

Most of the participants remembered being upset when they first learned they would be held back. If they remembered being upset, it was generally because they were sad about their friends moving on without them. The younger they were when they were retained, the more likely they were to have limited recollection of the event. The older they were when they were retained, the more likely they were to report stronger emotions when they learned the news. For example, the participants who were retained in fifth grade reported being angry when they learned they would be held back.

Participants learned of their retention in a variety of ways. Most of them were told by their parents toward the end of the school year. Some reported finding out during the summer. One participant said she discovered she was retained upon entering school on the first day of her repeated year. Two participants said they did not know they were retained until many years later. Two participants had a twin. One participant's twin was retained at the same time; the other participant's twin moved on without her. About half of the participants explained the reason for their retention in ways other than academic problems. Maturity, readiness, and other reasons were given for why some were held back.

Most of the participants said being held back helped them. They reported increased achievement or emotional and social readiness as a result of their retention. Slightly less than half of the participants claimed no benefits or

consequences for being held back. Either they did not remember being retained or they felt being retained had no impact on them.

Almost all of the participants took advantage of the opportunity given to them during the interview to give advice to educators about holding students back. Most of them advocated for giving struggling students extra help in the areas of difficulty as soon as the students show signs of need. Several advised making the decision with the parents. The participants who retained in later grades suggested involving the students in the retention decision. Generally, the collective advice was to take the decision seriously, consider the present situation, and consider the child's future.

Findings

The research findings were voluminous. Therefore, the results were divided into nine sections: family involvement, interpersonal characteristics, intrapersonal characteristics, school facilitation, school barriers, early memories, current impressions of the impact of retention, advice from those with experience, and other information. Eight sections include data from interviews and were organized from 812 coded responses. Each section includes an introduction, a display of the data, an interpretation of the data, and an illustration of themes using direct quotes. The ninth section is a presentation and interpretation of the social histories and academic records.

Family Involvement

”...influenced me to what I want to be to this day for the most part. It kind of shaped me for the most part. Defined me, I guess.”-A quote from Victor as he talked about his family.

Family involvement is the second largest section of the data at 112 coded responses. Themes and subclusters are indicated in Table 1. The strength of the themes are documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The themes that emerged from interview data are illustrated in Figure 1. The table in Appendix E displays family history data obtained by participants’ social history inventories.

Table 1

Themes and Subclusters for Family Involvement

Themes	Subcluster	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Mother’s support		47	22
	Mom pushed me	11	7
	Mom helped at home	16	10
	Mom’s decision to retain	16	11
	Close relationship	5	5
Parental support at home		8	8
Support from family members		13	10
Parents supporting their children, but not their children’s retention		10	6
Homelife barriers		34	17
	Instability	12	5
	Divorce	8	6
	Mobility	8	5
	Death	5	4
	Undereducated parents	1 (plus social history data)	10

Figure 1. Themes and Subclusters for Family Involvement

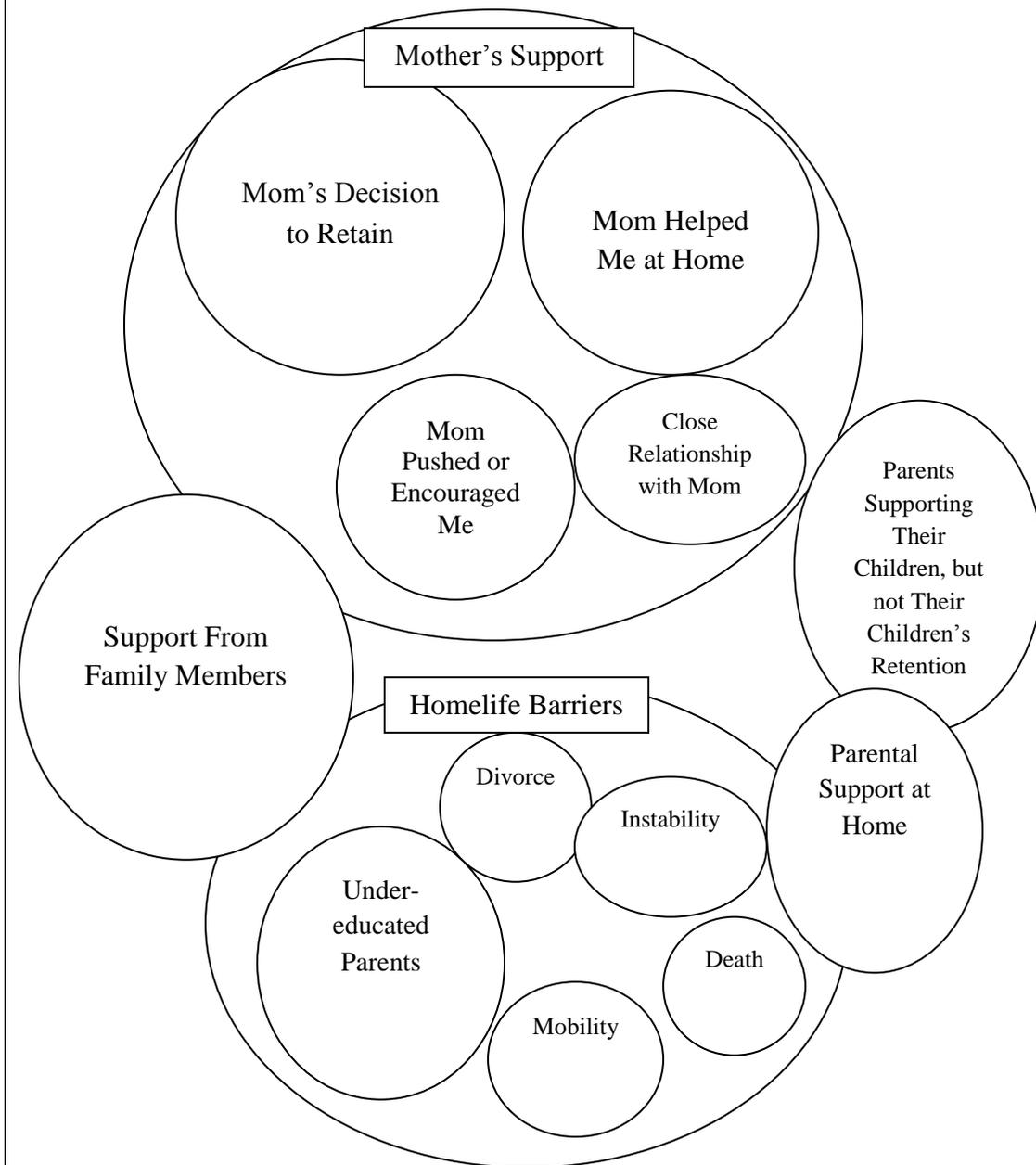


Figure 1. Strengths of themes and subclusters are shown by relative size of each circle. Strengths are based on the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response.

Interpretation of Family Involvement

Mother's support was the most dominant theme in this section. Mothers were most often mentioned as providing encouragement, being influential, and helping with school work. If mother was not present, then a mother figure was present. Every participant named someone who inspired them, and it was most often mom. Some mothers worked, some were unemployed. Some mothers were college educated, some were high school dropouts. A mother's status in life didn't seem to matter. Also, it didn't seem to matter if mothers supported retention, requested retention, or disagreed with retention. What mattered was mom being there for them.

Other family members provided encouragement and consolation when the participants were held back. Some participants talked about their parents helping them with schoolwork at home and being influential in their lives. A few participants said one or more of their parents did not support retention. However, the parents appeared to comply with the school system's decision and continued to support their children. All of the participants had a considerable network of support at home.

Divorce, death of a close family member, instability in the home, and mobility were some of the tough issues faced by participants. Although some parents were high school dropouts, participants didn't see their undereducated parents as barriers to their success. Only one participant mentioned having a parent who did not complete high school, but said the parent completed high school and went on to college later in life. I cannot assume that the participants were ashamed

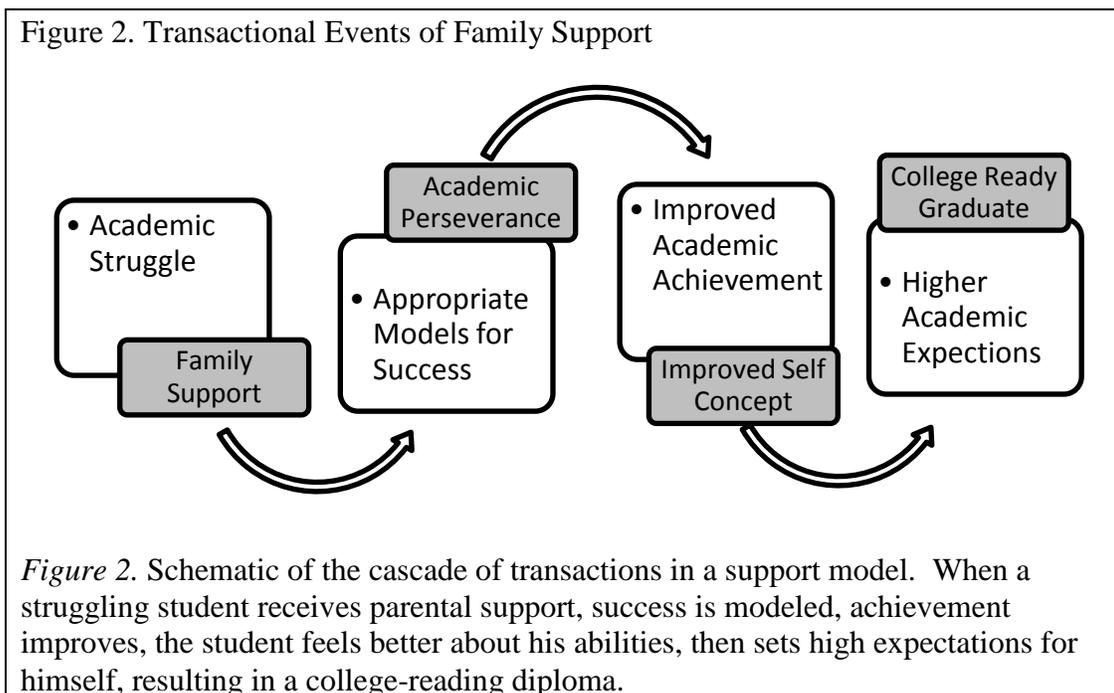
of their undereducated parents because they were forthcoming with the information when I asked. It appears that the issue was not a concern.

Many participants lived in poverty, as indicated by the social history inventories. However, they did not mention their parents' lack of income as a barrier to success. It seemed as though, unlike having undereducated parents, some participants noticed their poverty as characteristic of their environment. It is interesting to note that none of these barriers seemed to stand in the way of participants' success.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #2: "What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school?" Participants' parenting environments varied, however, there are a few commonalities. The strongest theme is their mothers' support. All of the participants, with one exception, described a mother who influenced, supported, and cared for them before, during, and after the retention event. Another theme, although not as strong, is family support. Almost half of the participants spoke about their considerable support network at home.

While some of the participants mentioned home life difficulties, the significance of each barrier pales in comparison to the support they experienced. About half of the participants mentioned having one or more problems in the home before, during, or after the retention event. The challenges faced by participants vary, therefore, no pattern can be discerned.

Also addressed in this section was Research Question #3: What are high school seniors' perceptions of how transactions between those environments over time shaped them into the people they are now?" Some participants talked about how their mothers pushed them to achieve and succeed. Support from home helped them bounce back from and persevere through the retention event. A cascade of transactional events regarding family support is illustrated by Figure 2.



Finally, the participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #4: What characteristics of resiliency did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success? All of the participants said they had supportive parents or at least one supportive adult during the time they were held back in elementary school. Some research (Steinhauer, 1996; Janas, 2002) suggested that supportive parents, or at least one supportive adult, is an environmental protective factor for resiliency. Most of the participants exhibited an

internal locus of control, which has been shown to be a characteristic of resiliency. According to Shaver and Mikulincer (2010), internalized control is a product of a secure parental attachment. They found that children who felt loved by their caregivers were free to explore their environments, develop autonomy, and were more likely to pursue goals and realize their aspirations. The participants in this study illustrated the connection between family support and characteristics of resiliency.

Mother's support. All of the participants indicated they had family support, most of which came from mom. Support came from mothers who were married to participants' fathers, mothers who were married to the participants' step fathers, and single moms.

Mom pushed or encouraged me. Single parent mothers seem to have supported and pushed their children as much as married mothers. At the time they were retained, seven participants were children of single mothers. "That made me push myself with the help of my mom. They just pushed...she pushed me to get my work done." This was quoted from Michael, who would be the first member in his family to graduate from high school. "That's what they've been waiting for. For me to be the first person to graduate." Aliah, also the first in her family to graduate from high school, said that her mother pushed her, too, "She told me to never give up. Like she pushes us every day." Some single mothers, such as William's, continued to push their children even in high school, "Well she pushes me to do my work," remarked William, when I asked about his mother.

Some participants, even though they lived with their mother and their father, talked mostly about their mothers. Anthony credits his mom for helping him through school. “I guess you could say my mom was always there for me when I was in school. If I needed anything, she would help me. Or even if she didn’t know how to do it, she would try to learn how to do it to help me.” Emily said that her mom was very influential in her school life, “She was my room mom from kindergarten through 5th grade! She was one of the main room moms. Always there, my mom.”

Mothers provided motivation, encouragement, and inspiration, and perhaps manipulated the environment to help their children succeed. Some moms were indirectly quoted by participants to not give up in the face of adversity. When Michael didn’t feel he was getting enough playing time on the basketball team, he wanted to change schools. “I was telling my mom that I wanted to move. She was like, I don’t know, just push it out.” Heather was upset at being retained in third grade. Her mother consoled her, “She’s always like, “It’s OK, don’t worry about it. It will get better.” Al was inspired by his mom’s strength, “That’s because you know, if I can see my mom dealing with three kids, you know, with barely nothing, as it is, you know. If she can make it, you know, then I can make it.” Morgan was a shy person until her mother encouraged her to get a job where she would have to interact with people. “That’s where she wanted me to work, actually, was a McDonald’s. Because I would have to deal with people, when I would just be pushed.” Knowing the importance of friends, Heather’s mom helped her make new friends during the summer before she was to repeat third grade. “I got over it

because I started hanging out with people that was a grade behind me. My mom was friends with their parents.”

Mom helped at home. Aliah said that her mother helped her and her brother at home, “Like she sits with us, you know, like through homework, she’ll sit there, make sure we’re good at it or doing good at it. ‘Cause she would sit there and help us or she would actually sit down and talk to us like if we were having problems or whatever, just to get through it.” Four other participants told stories of how their mothers helped them with reading at home. William said, “Well I guess that she would like read books to me to remember that uh, and she would like pick out a line and tell me to read it so to see if I could learn how to read better. And I always, every single day after school, I would get to play for thirty minutes and then come inside and do my homework.” Mandy did not often volunteer a lot of information, but she did indicate that she received help from her mom. “She just like made me, like made me read and stuff. I mean I just remember my mom helping me a lot.” Anthony’s story was more detailed, “I would get a book and it was sometimes really hard for me to read, and my mom and I would sit down on the couch, and I would try to read it to her. And she would help me try to she would help me with all the big words and, help me sound them out and help me read the story.” Morgan had help with spelling, “I remember my mom had these huge flash cards ‘cause I couldn’t get words or spelling. Spelling has been an issue. And she was like, ‘Before you can get this, you have to spell this word, before you can go outside, you have to spell this word.’ Trying to get me to learn them. We had these huge flash cards all

over the place. ‘Before you can watch TV, spell this word. During this commercial, spell this word.’ I was like, OK, mom.”

Mother’s decision to retain. Although current North Carolina law stipulates that the final decision regarding promotion and retention falls to the responsibility of the school principal, many of the participants in this study were held back at the request of their mothers. Emily said, “It was my mom’s choice, not the principal’s. She didn’t think that I was mentally ready.” Aliah’s mom held Aliah back. Aliah explained, “She was like, “Yeah, I held you back.” I was like, “Why?” She was like, “Well, you was behind, of the students out here. ‘Cause at your other school, they really didn’t teach you nothing.’ I was like, Oh. ‘Cause she thought it would be a good thing instead of still being behind.” Jeff disagreed with the decision, but he believed his mother was doing what she thought was best for him, “And they asked her if, you know, they thought I was ready for it. And she said she doesn’t think I was ready for it.” While Kelly wasn’t told at the time due to a messy divorce between her parents, she found out later that her mom made the final decision. “I believe, if I’m not mistaken, they gave her a choice to either let me go on or keep me back. And she was, they preferred for me to stay back so she just told, went ahead and said for me to stay back.” Ben’s mom also made the same decision, “Well, a lot of it was because I don’t, my mom didn’t think I was ready to move on to second grade.” Melissa was held back in 5th grade, but her mom talked to her about her struggles in reading and math early on in fifth grade and the possibility of being held back. “They told me that, you know, you’re struggling a lot. You’ve been struggling. And they thought this would be good for me.” Michael’s mother felt her

son was struggling in school, too. “Like I wasn’t reading up to date. Like she thought that I wasn’t capable of doing all the things that the other students were doing.”

Close relationship with mom. Most of the participants indicated that their moms were their most positive role models and influential persons in their lives. Emily said, “She is my favorite person in the whole world. She is my best friend. She knows everything about me. I can sit down with her and tell her anything.” Aliah looked up to her mother, “She just, um, is a person who never gives up. I look up to her. That’s the person I want to be when I get older.” Caroline echoed Emily and Aliah, “She is always there for me and we have an open relationship with each other. And I can tell her anything. I’m just really open with her. Most moms and their daughters aren’t that close. But we are really close. And just have the support that she’s given me, and she’s continued to give me and will always do that. I’m always happy that I could always lean on her whenever I need her. And she’s always going to be there no matter what.” Al is a self-proclaimed “mama’s boy,” even to the point of tattooing it on his arm. He said, “And you know, and even though she was facing those hard times, she never complained. And she never sat around. And you know, so she just made ways for things to happen for us. And so, when we moved back, things got a little harder. And she was just, you know, constantly motivated. Just, she never frowned, you know she never gave up on anything.” Mandy was appreciative of her mom’s support, “Well she kinda does everything for me. Like I don’t have a job or anything. She bought me a car and the same thing for my brother. So she kinda just, I guess just provided real well for us.”

Parental support at home. Parents were mentioned often as supportive, even helping with school work at home. Mother and father were both present in the home when 11 participants were retained. These participants often talked about their mothers and their fathers. Myron talked about his parental support, “Well my mom always gets mad at me when I get a bad grade. What ever I want to do my mom would or my dad would tell me to excel at what ever I want to do. They would push me to reach my dreams.” Emily mentioned how her parents tried to help her understand her retention, “My parents gave me a whole bunch of ideas. They gave me reasons why. That good things that will come from it.” Like Emily, Heather’s parents tried to help her through the trauma, “My family always telling me, “You’ll make it. Don’t worry.” I asked Victor to tell me who he looked up to. He said, “Well, my family, for one. I mean they always help.” He went on to talk about how his parents gave him his favorite hobby, “I was a passenger and my mom was the pilot, believe it or not. My dad got her a birthday gift of a flight lesson and I went along. So really, it was just her lesson. But she didn’t stay with the lessons; I did. A year later, when I was 12, my dad got me my first lesson. I’ve been taking lessons since then.” Melissa’s mother remarried soon after her divorce from Melissa’s first step father. However, she referred to them as her parents when she talked about being supported in school, “And my parents were very strict, so that helped a lot, too. Getting good grades. If we got anything below a C, we got in trouble. That kind of pushed me a lot more.” Morgan talked about her parents, “Well they’ve just always been there and, needed anything, I ever needed, they were there and they’ve just been there.” Emily mentioned that her parents helped her with school work at

home. Researcher: “So you worked with your parents at home?” Emily: “Yes, for hours on end. I was not allowed to go out and play until I did my homework. It actually worked.”

Support from family members. Other family members played influential roles in the lives of the participants. Almost every participant spoke of another family member who helped them succeed. Citing the absence of a parent figure, two participants said other family members stepped up to fill a void. Jacqueline’s mother used drugs and “she would have like company coming in and out.” Therefore, her grandmother stepped in to provide for her and her siblings. “My grandma. She was our mother when my mama wasn’t there. She took care of us. She fed us. She gave us money when we needed it. Um, she made sure we had something to eat. We had clothes on our backs. Um, she made sure we had our play time and stuff like that. Like kids needed. And she made sure we had to eat our vegetables. She always made us go to church. We’d have to be in the bed by 8:00. So she made sure that I would pass first grade the second time around. ‘Cause she became the mother at that time.” When her grandmother wasn’t filling in as her parent, Jacqueline’s aunt provided support. “She would let us come stay at her house. Um, up until now, she’s just been there. She’s been a shoulder I could cry on. And talk to when I’m angry or when situations would come up with my mama. I can tell her how I feel. And she would correct me if I’m just talking out of anger or she would say, ‘Just pray about it.’ She got me interested in church choir, church dancing and volunteering on Sat-, Thurs-, Saturdays with the homeless, feeding them. She’s just been wonderful.”

Grandparents were support people in addition to parental support. Jeff's parents were divorced, and he lived with his mother. However, his grandfather was his support. "And, uh, you know, he was always there. I'd come home and watch Andy Griffith with him. And I would do my homework and we would talk." Heather's grandfather encouraged her. "My grandpa always told me to hold my head up and not let things bother me. He told me, 'Don't say you can't do something because you know you can.' Or 'Can't never could' or something like that." Inspired in part by her grandmother, Morgan said she plans to become a teacher. "She's just someone I've always looked up to. Like how she's always been with me. She was a teacher and so I kinda wanted to follow her. She was the one who actually wanted, or not wanted me to be a teacher, but showing me who I kinda looked up to be a teacher. 'Cause I always wanted to be like my grandma. It's just someone who I've always wanted to be like."

Some participants enjoyed a close relationship with siblings who supported them. William's older sister was a role model for him. "She tells me what she did and stuff, like did a bunch of clubs and studied a lot. And sometime you got to stop hanging out with friends and study more in order to get into a better college. So you don't get stuck going to a community college." Also, William's sister helped him with his school work when he was held back in kindergarten, "She just tried to help me out with some stuff that I missed in school." Anthony's older brother supported him through the retention. My bigger brother was always a straight A student. Um, he has never failed any of his classes. Uh, smartest person I know. Um, like he would help me on my homework." Kelly's parents divorced around the time she

was retained in third grade. She found comfort in her little brother's company.

“Cause we used to sit together. He was going through the same thing I was. Except he just wasn't involved in the whole divorce thing. We'd sit in our room and do like homework together.” Sibling support tended to take the form of humor with Anthony. His older and “smarter” brother tried to make light of the retention, “He laughed at me. Uh, started pickin' on me. But I guess he was cool with it too. Like I mean we still joke about it still to this day.” Other siblings reacted differently as they showed their support. Al had to console his sister when she heard the news of his retention, “And like my big sister came up and she heard my mom say that I failed and she started crying. So it really hit her harder than it hit me. It's going to sound kinda funny but there's this connection between me and my sister, you know, one cries, the other one picks on 'em. I was just like, you know joking around with her. 'I'm the one getting held back, why are you crying?’” Jeff's sister empathized with him when she found out about his retention, “She was just like questioning my mom, trying to figure out why.”

Family members attempted to ease the pain of retention for some participants. Heather's uncle was held back in the same grade as she. “Cause my uncle was like he told me not to worry that everything was going to be OK. That he got held back and there was nothing really to worry about.” Emily reported her parents giving her reasons why being held back would help her, “They had mentioned that like you'll get another year at this. You'll get to relearn it, you'll understand it better. You will have had more time to learn it than everybody else. Because you've learned it once already, maybe you'll understand it more so.” Even

a temporary fix worked for Michael when he was told he wasn't going to 2nd grade, "I don't know I think my mom kind of bribed me. She was, "It's going to be OK, da da da. Let's go get some ice cream." I thought, OK, ice cream. Ice cream will make everything better."

Parents supporting their children but not their children's retention.

Six participants indicated their parents did not support their retention.

Although parents may not have supported the decision, they did remain supportive of their children. According to Caroline, her parents believed her to be on grade level with the other students, "She was kind of, a little bit, she was not pleased that, with the teacher, of course, making that decision, but, at the same time, she supported me and was, had my interests all the way." Myron was retained in kindergarten, but reported having little memory of the circumstances. He offered, "I barely know, all I know was that my mom was upset with the teachers. I have no idea why." Heather reported her mother not agreeing with the decision, but understanding the reason behind it, "Well the teacher had talked to her and she was like there's nothing she could really do about it. Like she wasn't happy about it but she understood because her brother got held back in third grade with the same problem. Everybody in our family has like some kind of reading problem."

Some participants talked about how their parents' divorce affected the decision to retain. Three participants talked about one or both of their parents not supporting the decision. William was retained in kindergarten during his parents' divorce. According to William, his dad took him out of school so much that his attendance issues caused him to be held back. His mother faulted his father, "I

believe she wanted me to go to first grade like a normal kid, whatever, and see if I could develop the stuff that I missed later on in life. She told me that she would prefer me to go on to first grade. But you know 'cause my dad, I can't, and I had to stay in kindergarten for one more year." Donna was held back in second grade during her parents' divorce. She reported them feeling mixed about the decision, "Either my mom or my dad, like one of them was like, 'No, this is probably not a good idea.' And then, it was like 'Oh, it might help.' I think my mom told her no and my teacher said I had to do it." Jeff's mother remarried after his parents' divorce, but Jeff reported maintaining a close relationship with his father. He said his father's reaction to his mother's decision was much like his, "he kinda found out, you know, through the grape vine. And he questioned my mom up and down and started cussing her. Stuff like that 'cause he was irritated, you know, 'cause I was gonna stay back. And he didn't like that."

Homelife barriers. For several participants, family life appeared to pose a barrier to success. Instability in the home, divorce, mobility, death, and undereducated parents were some of the subclusters created from 34 quotes.

Undereducated parents. Five participants indicated their mothers did not have a high school education at the time they were held back. However, only one participant mentioned it without my directly questioning them about their mother's education. As Michael talked about how his mom pushed him in school, he said, "My mom got pregnant with me so she didn't graduate." But then he quickly added, "But she still went to college." Three participants did not know the level of their

fathers' education when they were retained. Five other participants said their fathers did not graduate from high school.

Divorce. Divorce plagued seven participants. Three of the six participants suffered through their parents' divorce the year they were held back in elementary school. William was hesitant to blame his attendance problems on the divorce; however, I managed to encourage him to talk about it. "When I was in kindergarten, my dad took me out of school a lot 'cause family just recently got divorced so I missed too many days. My mom took me up to another town and uh, my dad didn't really get to see me that much so he took me out of school. My dad didn't want me to go to summer school and so I had to repeat." William did not blame his lack of attendance for his academic struggles, but he did seem to think it affected his social life. "Well I guess I didn't really get along with the other kids that much, 'cause I didn't really see 'em that often and didn't really develop any friends at that time." When I asked him why he didn't make friends even in the limited time he was in school, he replied, "I was kinda like moody 'cause my parents being divorced."

Donna's parents divorced during the year she was held back, and then she changed schools. "I had a counselor 'cause my parents actually got divorced when I was in second grade. And so they made me get a counselor." I asked her why she moved to a different school. She replied, "They said it was because they got divorced, which was kind of a perfect timing because that's right at the time they were getting a divorce just when I got transferred from second grade." She seemed to be glad that she changed schools, "Yeah, I changed schools because, I guess like humiliation. Like my friends all went on and then I wouldn't be able to go on and

so, it would be awkward to be held back.” She talked mostly of her mother’s involvement in her retention. I asked her about her father’s feelings regarding her retention. “I don’t think it was really his choice because, um, he like worked all the time and my mom and my dad would always get into like arguments. So my dad didn’t probably have a say so in it at the time, ‘cause he was at work a lot and so he didn’t do anything about it.”

When I asked Kelly what she remembered about elementary school, she said, “My mom and dad’s divorce when I was in the third grade. Yeah. And I was more focused on them than I was school and I let it all kinda get in here. (pointing to her head.)”

For four participants, divorce or splitting up occurred before they were held back in school. Melissa, who was retained in fifth grade, talked about her parents’ divorce and their mobility. “My parents got divorced when I was in second grade. My mom moved to apartments in another school district. And then she met my stepdad. And we moved to another town.” Demetrius, who was held back in first grade, mentioned that his parents divorced early, “Actually, it was when we were like one or two years old, and then they split up. We was with my mom and she was by herself or whatever.” Joyce was not specific about when her parents split. “What happened was my birth mother and father split up. And um, my birth mother just really didn’t make me a priority. I was ...am adopted by my grandparents. And um, so they adopted me at the age of one.” Jeff’s mother remarried years before she made the decision to hold him back in fifth grade.

Other participants either did not speak of their other parent, or they mentioned that the other parent was not around much. At first, Al spoke only of his mother. I asked about his father's reaction to his retention. "I don't think he so much knew because him and my mom weren't on good terms at that time. So, I don't really know how things worked out right then." Aliah only spoke of her mother, "And my mom, we're close. But I don't talk to my dad. I don't really know where's he's at." Similar to Aliah, Jacqueline mentioned her father only once when she talked about her second year in first grade. "My daddy actually entered my life again at that time. And mama was going back out with him. He was living with us..." Michael rarely talked about his parents and mentioned his father only once. "My mom got pregnant with me so she didn't graduate." As we were talking about Michael's love for sports, he mentioned his dad. "My father and uncle, they played football and basketball."

Instability in the home. Twelve quotes from five participants exemplified instability in the home. In addition to Al and Aliah mentioning their mobility and single parents, three other participants told stories of instability in their homes. The most dramatic and extreme instability was reported by Jacqueline. She talked of her mother using drugs and eluded to prostitution occurring in the home. "I know that elementary school was a rough time for me because, um, my mom was using drugs. And I really didn't understand anything until I got in middle school. But we got taken from her when I was in third or fourth grade. It was third or fourth grade. And, um, she would have like company coming in and out." Jacqueline lived in several places as she grew up. "I lived in a, well no, it was fifth? sixth? Fifth and

sixth grade I lived in a group home. Seven and eighth, through high school, I lived with my aunt.” While not sorry she was held back, Jacqueline seemed to resent her mother and blamed her for why she had so many difficulties in school. “It was kind of frustrating because um, part, well most of the reason why I was held back was ‘cause of her. It was her fault because she was the one that was on drugs. She was the one that had company coming over all times of the night and stuff.” Jacqueline talked of raising siblings, “I was helping my grandma with my youngest kids. And I learned quickly about bottles and pacifiers and changing diapers. I was changing diapers at the, when I was in second, third grade.”

Living in a group home was experienced by another participant. Demetrius explained, “We left one school because um, my mom was doing something that she wasn’t supposed to be doing. It was just really hard to go to school. It was just hard for like my mom to take care of all three of us. And going to school. And then my dad and step mom had to come take us. And that’s when we started living with them.” I asked him how long he and his twin brother and sister lived with his father. He replied, “Third and fourth grade. So, I guess, two years.” Erroneously, I assumed he moved back with his mother, but he said, “No, they sent us to uh, another school. And we went to that school. We were in a group home for, Um, seven and a half years.” During the interview, Demetrius explained that he and his siblings recently left the group home, and he was currently living with his father. “It was time for us to get out of the group home. So we moved back here. Since we’re older now, we can start taking care of ourselves.”

Being adopted and raised by her grandparents seemed to be a huge emotional barrier for Joyce. “I think I had a lot of separation anxiety because I was, am adopted by my grandparents. And, um, so they adopted me at the age of one. And then I lost all contact with my birth mother probably at the age of six. So just having that inconsistency of family, you know, your birth mother in your life, I just had a lot of, you know. So that’s why it was hard for me my first year in kindergarten to be separated because with my birth mother, when she would come visit me, I never knew if I would see her again.” When I asked Joyce to talk about the personal struggle, she said, “What happened was my birth mother and father split up. And, um, my birth mother just really didn’t make me a priority. She would just leave me at places. Even though I can’t remember things as a baby, I truly think it’s because she would just leave me, like when she went over to somebody’s house, she would just leave me there with them. And she would just disappear for a couple of days and then come pick me up. And even I know I can’t remember that, I think that has something to do with it. Um, the last time I saw her, I was five or six and it was on a Mother’s Day. After that, you know, I remember her coming in and out of my life and I knew I was different from the rest of the kids ‘cause they lived with their mom and dad.”

Mobility. Five participants indicated they attended several schools during their elementary years. Aliah could not remember all of them. “I didn’t really like the school so, well we moved a lot. ‘Cause I remember going to a different school before that, I wonder what school it was, no it was after my first school. ‘Cause she moved, we moved near our friend, her friend. But I don’t know what school it was, I

just remember going. It was out here somewhere, like near the high school, somewhere. I don't know what it was, and then we moved out to another town." I asked her if she stayed there. She replied, "Yeah. For a while and then, I just remember we kept moving."

Unlike Aliah, Donna remembered her school moves. "I went to like a bigger town and then we moved a whole bunch. Like in that city and then I went to like this school, that school, and I went everywhere." When I asked Melissa what she remembered most about elementary school, she said, "I switched schools a lot." She named all three schools she attended by fifth grade.

As an interviewer, I struggled to keep up with the mobility as I listened to Al talk about his homelife. He talked about straightening out his life two years after he was retained. "I was actually starting to head down the right road by then. You know, I had moved in with my mom." I asked with whom he lived when he was retained in second grade. He said, "I was actually staying with my dad. And so I had moved out to another town with my mom. And so the roller coaster just, you know." Just when I thought I understood his living patterns, he said, "Actually, I moved back in with my dad when I started tenth grade here. And so, just recently, I'd say about two months ago, my mom moved to a different town with my two other sisters. So, it's been back and forth, back and forth."

Demetrius was not as forthcoming with his homelife as I had hoped, but he gave me a glimpse into his mobility. "Well I switched elementary school at least like 4 or 5 times. I can probably name them."

Death. Four participants spoke of a death in their families that altered the trajectory of their lives. Al spoke of his brother's drowning, "And it was just like, it was one of them things where, you know, it like takes the breath out of you and you just like lose focus. I can't really say I've actually overcome it. Like, 'cause I'm not actually over it." I asked Al how this tragic accident affected his school work. He said, "You know, I just, I, I didn't think I was going to be able to finish." Jacqueline seemed to have survived her rough childhood with the help of her grandmother, but then her grandmother died when Jacqueline was in high school. "She passed. Um, in my junior year. Which was the hardest year out of my high school career. And my life was just like ruined. And I really didn't care anymore afterwards. And um, after that, um, my grades was already in the gutter, so um, and it was the ending so it's like whatever. I can't pull 'em up now. I can't do anything so why bother." Jeff's grandfather passed away the year he was held back in fifth grade. Without his grandfather's help, Jeff said he struggled in math. "Always had my grandpa there to help me. And, you know, he passed away. And when I started doing it by myself now, I realized it wasn't that easy for me. It was easier when he told me how to do it." Jeff reminisced about his grandfather during the interview, "I'd come home and watch Andy Griffith with him. And I would do my homework and we would talk. 'Cause, see my dad wasn't in the picture when I was growing up. So my grandpa was my father figure." Although Melissa did not report any negative impact on her education because of her experience with death, she talked about it adding stress to her life. "My little sister passed away my second grade year. My mom had lost

twins before that, too. That was pretty hard. My parents got divorced right after that. That's why we changed schools. A bunch of stress."

Interpersonal Characteristics

"The friends that were in the same grade as me that second year, they became my best friends. So every year, like the grade I was in, I'd find a new friend."

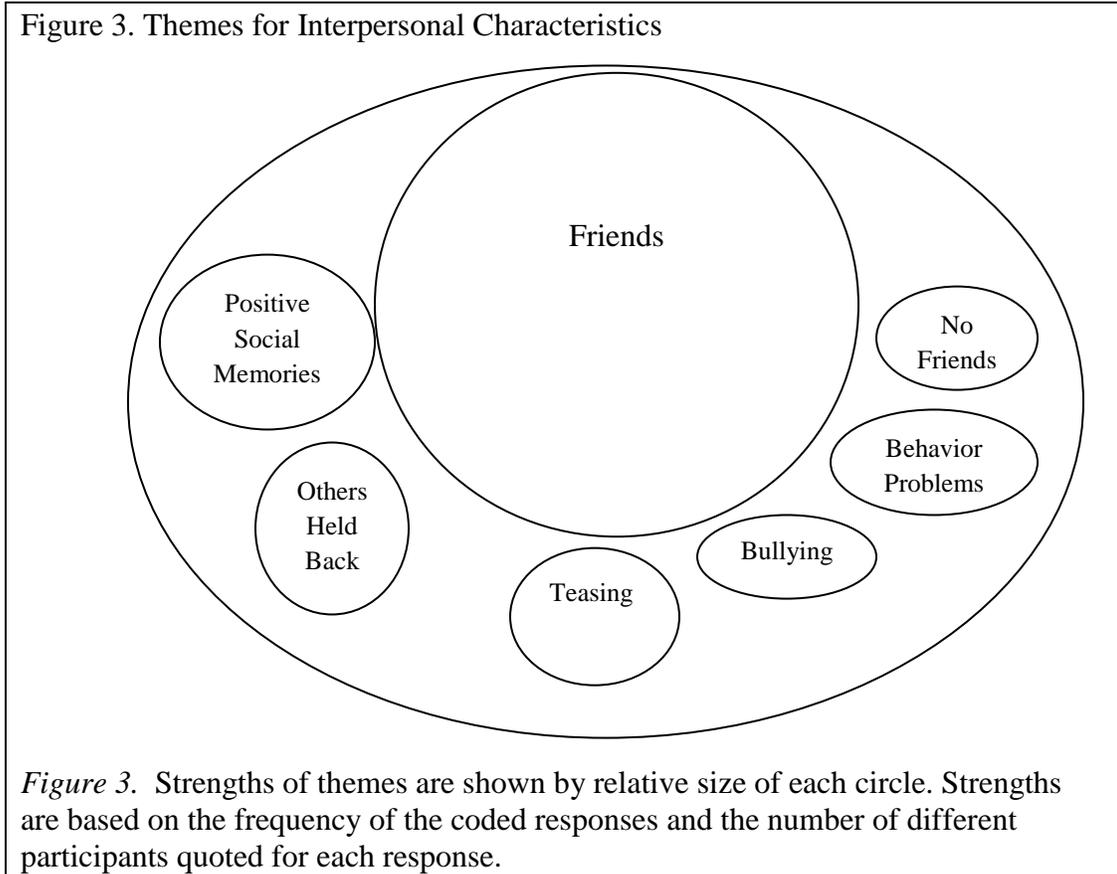
-Michael

This section contains 78 coded responses from which seven themes emerged, some of which were strengths, some of which were challenges. Interpersonal characteristic themes are indicated in Table 2. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The components of this section and the themes that emerged are illustrated in Figure 3. Interpretation of the evidence includes a summation of the themes and answers to research questions. Evidence is presented by documented examples of direct quotes from the participants that illustrate themes.

Table 2

Themes for Interpersonal Characteristics

Themes	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants Involved in the Responses
Friends	43	17
Positive Social Memories	9	6
Others Held Back	8	5
Teasing	6	6
Bullying	8	3
Behavior Problems	5	3
No Friends	5	4



Interpretation of Interpersonal Characteristics

The importance of friends dominated as a common theme throughout this section. Participants seemed to be able to make friends easily, have friends for a long time, and develop close relationships. One personality characteristic of resiliency has shown to be extroversion, and it is evidenced by each participant's ability to use friendships to overcome retention trauma. When trauma existed, participants seemed to be able to minimize it with the help of friends.

Several participants reflected on happy social events or situations that involved groups of people. These positive memories could be linked to participants' overall positive outlook on life. Like friendliness, a positive outlook has shown to be

a personality characteristic of resiliency. Participants with a positive outlook on life tended to minimize the trauma of retention and contain other trauma in their lives.

A few minor themes regarding social challenges emerged. Some participants mentioned being sad that their retention caused them to lose their friends. However, the feelings of loss seemed temporary since the participants soon found a new set of friends. If there were any difficulties early on with making friends, then participants appeared to have quickly overcome those difficulties.

Two participants talked about current concerns regarding their friends graduating and leaving them behind. Although only two participants expressed feeling alone, their stories richly illustrate the frustration and loneliness that may be experienced by seniors who found lasting friendships from within their original class.

Bullying appeared to be an isolated event for one participant, a painful life-long albatross stemming from a physical disability for another, and a complex series of transactional events in the life of a third participant. Within the theme of bullying, no commonality appeared to exist.

On contrast, some commonalities existed between the participants who talked about behavior problems. All three participants remembered very little about being held back. All three were minorities who lived in poverty. All three participants characterized their behavior problems as disrespect. Nevertheless, both themes, bullying and behavior problems, were weak in comparison to the other themes.

Although bullying appeared to be unrelated to retention, being teased was directly related to being held back. Teasing appeared to be a moderately strong

theme, as it was mentioned by six different participants. The vivid memories from which the graphic stories were told suggest teasing has a lasting effect on the victims.

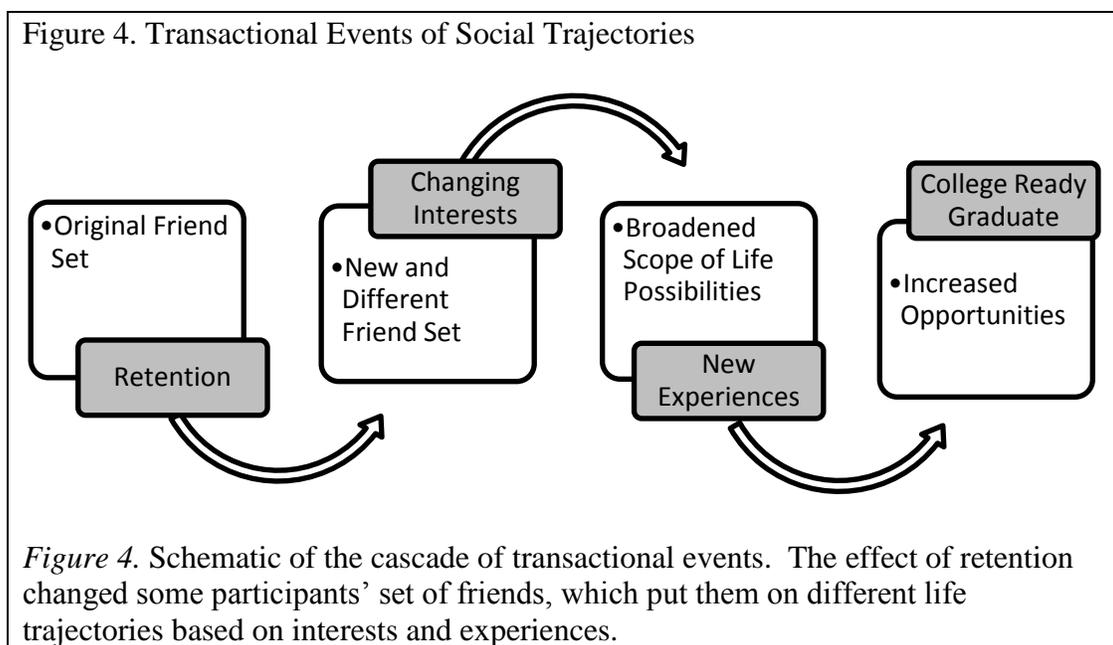
The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #1: How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school? Some participants said they were glad to have matriculated through school with their current class rather than their original class. Most of the participants were able to make new friends easily after they were held back, however, two participants exhibited feelings of loneliness as a result of watching their friends graduate before them. Some participants seemed to maintain friendships across grade levels through high school. However, when their friends from the upper class left, some participants felt left behind.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #2: What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school? Most of the participants appeared to have good friends before they were held back and were able to make friends easily after they were held back. Several participants enjoyed positive social events in elementary school and shared pleasant memories.

The participants' responses from this section also addressed Research Question #3: What are high school seniors' perceptions of how transactions between those environments over time shaped them into the people they are now? Some participants mentioned that being held back with their current group of friends

shaped them into a different person than who they might have been otherwise. As they developed new friendships, they developed new interests. A cascade of transactional events regarding social trajectories is illustrated by Figure 4.

Finally, the participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #4: What characteristics of resiliency did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success? Masten & Cicchetti (2010) defined resiliency as a product of interventions that interrupted negative pathways. In this sense, a new and different friend set for these participants may have interrupted the negative social effects of retention. In addition, the participants seemed to value their friends, which suggests they were not self-centered. One characteristic of resilient children, according to Henderson (1998), is they tend to think of others and are less self-centered compared to non-resilient children.



Friends. Every participant talked about the importance of friends and friendships. Four participants talked about the ease with which they made friends.

Michael said he was surrounded by friends. "I always had friends around me. Either in school, on football teams, on basketball teams, at the house. It was like every where I'd go, I would make friends. It was like every day somebody was trying to be my friend. I'm just a friendly person." Myron spoke of his popularity in elementary school. "Everybody always wanted to do everything with me. Everybody always followed me. This one kid cried because I didn't want to sit with him and sat with someone else." I wanted to know if having to make new friends was an issue for Melissa when she was held back in 5th grade. I asked her if she made new friends. She said, "Just right away. I had a lot of friends."

Several participants referenced making new friends as they were held back. This appeared to be a common theme throughout 12 of the interviews. Emily seemed glad to shed her old class of friends for a new and better set of friends. "I made better friends. I actually like the class that I graduated with more so than the class I was in. I felt very welcomed when I started my first day of third grade again." This was echoed by Dawn who seemed to be outcast by her first kindergarten class. "I've always been kind of an oddball. I loved wearing black in kindergarten. Um, just always been an odd, different person." Dawn indicated that her parents wanted her retained because she was bullied by members of her class. "They didn't really want me proceeding with that group of students as you know being the class I would go through school with. They would prefer me to, you know, try with another batch of kindergartners and see how I interacted with them." I asked her about her second year in kindergarten and she replied, "I had many more friends." William also saw retention as a chance to increase his social circle. "I

wasn't too upset because I didn't really have that many friends in kindergarten so. Thought it was another chance to meet some kids." When I asked William about his second year in kindergarten, he replied, "Easier. And made more friends then. And stayed friends with them now until this day." Ben reflected on his circle of friends, "And I have a really a whole lot of really good friends. And actually, when I look at it now, I'm glad I got held back. 'Cause if I didn't, I wouldn't know the people I know now."

Some participants were skilled at making friends. Aliah seemed to have many opportunities to develop this skill. "I just remember we kept moving. Then had to make new friends. Other than that, it was just me making friends. It was easy. Like my first time, I remember my first time going to a new school. A little girl just walked up to me and said, 'Hey.' So that was my best friend. And we're still friends now. Like, I got along with everybody." Victor did not remember much about his kindergarten retention other than making new friends. He said, "Well I met a few, the second year I was in kindergarten, I met a few friends that I'm still really close to today. The first year, uh, there's still a few guys in there, too. But to be honest, the second year has more of an impact, to be honest." Caroline credits her retention for helping her develop a lasting relationship with her best friend. "I actually continued on with school and I met new friends along the way and I actually gained a best friend my year when I was held back. So it was really good for me. And we're still friends today. And she's practically like my sister 'cause I'm an only child."

Some participants were sad about their friends moving on without them, but quickly made new friends. For example, making new friends during the summer of the year she was retained seemed to ease the humiliation Heather was feeling. “I got over it because I started hanging out with people that was a grade behind me. After I got held back, I didn’t really talk to the people in the grade...the people who moved on. I didn’t talk to them or anything. I just made new friends.” Hilary remembered being sad about losing her friends as she was held back, but she quickly made new friends. “I remember having friends that were in the third grade when I was still in the second grade. And I wondered why they were above me and I guess it doesn’t really matter because I made more friends.” Making friends seemed to be a highlight in school for many participants. I asked Joyce about her best elementary memories. She answered, “Making new friends. It was fun.”

Positive social memories. Having friends was a large part of the participant’s positive social memories in elementary school. In addition to friends, six participants explicitly referenced positive social events during their primary days. Recess seemed to be a positive event for some participants. Michael said he loved recess. “Like every Friday, we’d just get to go outside and play. I don’t know..I just like to play. I was a playful kid.” I asked Jeff to tell me about his best memories of elementary school, “Probably recess. I love going ‘cause we had a rock wall out there. I loved that thing. And we played football.” It wasn’t recess, but Al talked about P.E. as though it offered similar opportunities for play, “I was just, you know, it was the time of the day where I could go have fun and not worry about stressing over work, you know, not turning this in, not turning that in. It was just a time, I just

felt free to play, enjoy myself.” Demetrius, too, referenced play when I asked him to remember elementary school, “Just having like going outside and playing like on the monkey bars and stuff.” Emily remembered social part of elementary school when I asked her to tell me what she liked best, “I liked all the parties we had...” Myron remembered being at the center of girls’ attention, “Constantly, I had um...who would go knocking on my, like my mom’s door and they’d say “I’m going to marry Myron when I grow up.”

Others held back. Five participants remembered not being the only one held back. They mentioned noticing at least one other person who was retained. Emily said that it made her feel better to have another retainee in her grade, “But I remember meeting someone actually the year I was held back, like when I had gone back to third grade, that there was a girl who was held back also. She liked it better, too!” William noticed that he wasn’t alone in being held back, “I remember there were a few other kids who were retained that year, but I wasn’t sure why.” He remembered some of them being in his class the second time in kindergarten. “She had a couple other kids in there. She treated us like it was our first time around.” Al also remembered not being alone, “Cause me and a classmate had the same class and uh, we both failed the same test so, you know, they kinda brought us out in the hallway and, you know, told us about it.” Heather remembered several other retainees, including her new teacher’s son, was with her the second time in third grade, “Cause there was like a group of us that got held back.” Although Mandy did not know anyone in her new class after she was held back, she did report

knowing that one other student had been retained, too, “I think there was one other kid in there that got held back, too.”

Teasing. Seven coded responses captured quotes from six different participants about being teased about their being held back. The quotes range in cruelty from what Myron referred to as a small joke, “I get this small joke that you were held back in kindergarten. ‘Course I would do the same thing. C’mon it’s kinda hard to believe you were held back in kindergarten” to more harsh comments such as Hilary’s account, “‘Cause when I tell people that I stayed back in second grade, they are like, ‘what are you, stupid?’ or something.” Morgan recounted a painful teasing incident, “This kid in I remember on the bus in, this kid would have been in second grade, ’cause he was in my first first grade class. He was like, ‘Why aren’t you in second grade?’ And he just sat there and teased me and teased me about how I was in first grade twice and I got to stay with the same teacher. I went home several times crying. Because he would sit there and make fun of me on the bus.” Kelly said she was afraid she would be picked on in middle school but it didn’t happen. I asked her why she feared being teased in middle school when she had been held back in third grade. She recounted earlier incidents, “About 5th grade, between 3rd and 5th, they were picking on me about it and I was like, when I was first going in to middle school, I was like, Oh gosh. It’s going to be back.” I asked her to give me an example, and she responded, “It was like, tell me I was not smart enough to go on...”

Bullying. The bullying incidents appeared to occur outside of the retention issue. Donna was quite vocal about recurring bullying problems, “I think it was like

in first or second. This girl picked on me a bunch and she actually took like salt and pepper and put it in like a towel and like threw it in my eyes. I got picked on a bunch in like middle school and my freshman year. And I used to beg my mom if I could like stay home and be home schooled. Last year, I had a big problem with this. This girl threatened to beat me up like four times. She would be like, 'I'm going to smack the taste out of your mouth.' And I would just be like I would laugh at her. 'Like you're not going to do anything. And if you are I'm going to stand here and let you touch me. I'm not going to fight you back.' I came to the office a few times and it was down to the point that like if she were to touch me or even threaten me one more time, they were kicking her out and she wouldn't graduate. Then I'd be stuck with her for another year. So I finally dropped it and I was like she's graduating! And I don't have to deal with her anymore." I asked Demetrius about his moving from one school to another. He explained, "I think it was. When kids like pickin' on me." I asked him why they picked on him and he said, "Uh, I'm not sure. Just bullies."

Dawn seemed to campaign against bullying. She was quoted five times about bullying. She cited several incidents including the following, "There was a time, last year um, I was trying really hard to fit in with people at the time because I wanted the bullying to stop. So I tried fitting in with them. And I was dating a football player. And he cheated on me right in front of me. He was kissing another girl. And the girl saw me, started laughing and walked up to me and said, 'You think I care, loser?' And after that, for weeks, this girl and her friends just harassed me. They called me fat. Said I should go die." I asked Dawn where the bullying at

school occurred. She answered, “Usually in the cafeteria in the mornings because that’s when all the students are around. That’s where, my entire life, where most of the bullying has happened. In the cafeteria where there are lots of students. Few teachers. Few supervision.” In addition, she said, “I mean I know the country’s now really starting to go towards trying to figure out and prevent bullying but not enough is being done. Not enough at all.”

Behavior problems. Three students talked about their challenges with civility. While they did not explain their behavior issues, they illustrated them richly. Aliah talked about the disrespect she exhibited early in her life and how she tried to avoid problems later. She said, “I was a very hard child in class ‘cause I didn’t really listen. I just didn’t listen. Like I didn’t like the students there, or the teachers. Like they were really rude. I was just, I used to talk back all the time, too.” Later in the interview, I asked Aliah what she was proud of in high school, and she answered, “I think staying out of trouble was a big thing. Cause it was a lot of drama. It’s a lot of drama in high school and I was always tended to be in the middle of it. But like my senior year, I stayed out of trouble.” Jacqueline’s first time in first grade found her in trouble. She explained, “Cause my first time, all I did was mostly sleep. And they would say, ‘Are you not getting your rest?’ And I was mostly up in the office ‘cause I would sleep. And when they would try to wake me up, I’d be grouchy.” Al described his behavior problems. “I was a real bad student back then. I didn’t listen, you know. I got phone calls home every day. And it was just, it was just an everyday thing.”

No friends. Four participants described their challenges with making friends either early in their educational careers or in their present situation. William blamed his difficulty on his parents' divorce. "Well I guess I didn't really get along with the other kids that much, 'cause I didn't really see 'em that often, and didn't really develop any friends at that time. I was kinda like moody 'cause my parents being divorced." However, William mentioned that he was able to make friends later. He said, "Once I went to the other school, I got, you know, I made better friends. And stayed friends with them now until this day." Dawn talked about her rough beginning in kindergarten due to her medical disability and the cruelty she endured from her peers. "I had no friends at all." Like William, Dawn was able to make friends during her second time in kindergarten. I asked her to tell me the best parts of elementary school, and she said, "Probably definitely my friends. I started making more and more friends. One of my friends in third grade, we're still best friends."

Two participants talked about their current social voids. Mandy indicated that her friends graduated from high school the year before her and she has had a difficult time making new friends. "'Cause that, like last year was all my friends. Like I don't even know anybody hardly in this school 'cause they're a whole lot younger than me." Mandy seemed to become somewhat irritated when talking about friends at school. I asked her to talk about the nature of her feelings, and she said, "Only reason I came here is to cheer. And then I cheered my freshman and sophomore year. Then this year I didn't MAKE it. So I don't even want to be here anymore." Similar to Mandy's frustration at not feeling a part of her high school

environment because she was no longer part of the cheerleading squad, Jeff expressed feeling alone. “You know, times have got rough. And like I didn’t really want to BE here, especially when all my friends graduated. I have nobody here to talk to any more. And like I had my sister’s friends here like when I first started here. So they were kinda hanging out with me so I wasn’t really considered a freshman; I was kinda like a senior, already. And when they all left, I had nobody to talk to. And then, I just didn’t want to be here anymore.”

Intrapersonal Characteristics

“I thought positively and put a smile on my face and said, “I can do this.”

– Caroline

This section represents one of the largest sections with 104 coded responses. Themes and subclusters for intrapersonal characteristics are indicated in Table 3. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The themes and subclusters are illustrated in Figure 5. Evidence is presented by documented examples of direct quotes from the participants that illustrate themes and subclusters.

Seventy-four quotes described participants’ personality flaws that manifested themselves in outward ways and inner turmoil. However, 24 quotes could not be grouped in a code family or theme because they represented a single thought or idea that could not be connected to another thought or idea. For example, one participant said she was lazy, another participant said he was moody, and two others said they were shy when they were children. Most of the subclusters were created from direct quotes; other subclusters were coded based on what was inferred from what

participants said. Some of the self-deprecating comments and apparent behaviors may have been present before retention; others may have resulted from being held back. Most of these quotes were unsolicited; they occurred as the participants reflected on their situations.

Table 3

Themes and Subclusters for Intrapersonal Characteristics

Themes	Subcluster	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Resilience		44	18
	Reconciling retention	26	13
	Overcoming challenges and barriers	15	7
	Self reliance	3	3
Motivation		10	8
	Afraid of being retained again	4	3
	Worked hard	3	3
	Proud of success	3	3
Fears		17	7
	Fear of losing friends	9	4
	Worried about humiliation	8	5
Being embarrassed		7	6
Self-deprecating thoughts		7	5
Attention problem		10	6
Immaturity		9	5

Figure 5. Themes for Intrapersonal Characteristics

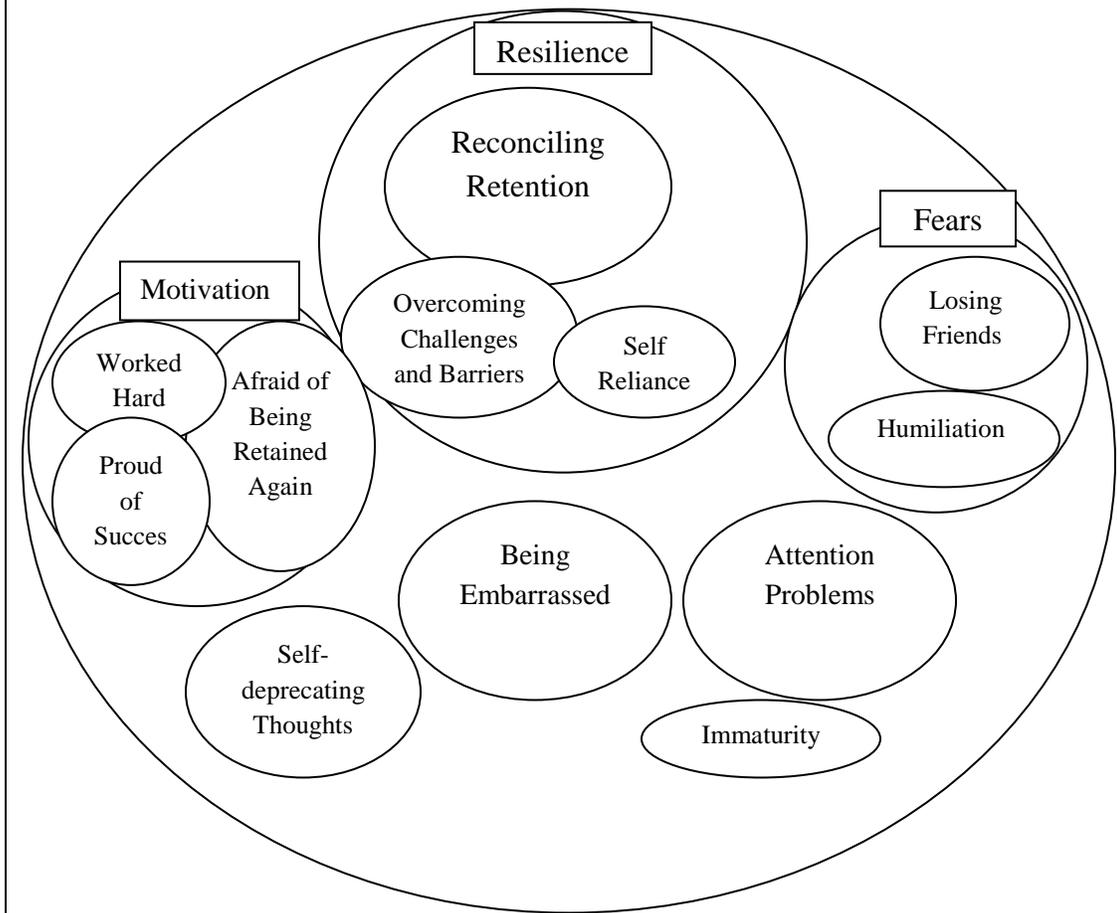


Figure 5. Strengths of themes and subclusters are shown by relative size of each circle. Strengths are based on the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response.

Interpretation of Intrapersonal Characteristics

On the whole, participants were able to reconcile their retention through their sense of resilience. They seemed to have come to terms with it quickly, and they easily rationalized it. Many of the participants actually put a positive spin on being held back. They talked about how being held back helped them academically and socially.

Participants seemed to face challenges rather than cower from them. They talked about being motivated by failure, and they worked hard to overcome barriers. Several participants said they pushed themselves to succeed.

Each participant detailed a positive trait about themselves. They talked about their good grades, awards, and their Honors classes. All of the participants seemed self-assured and confident.

Almost equal to the number of strengths, intrapersonal challenges were discussed by about the same number of participants. Eighteen participants talked about their inner struggles. Participants mentioned being embarrassed by retention, being afraid they would suffer humiliation, or lose their friends. However, all of those struggles occurred early, more at the time they were held back. None of the participants said they continued to wrestle with these issues as they got older. It is important to note that, although some participants worried about losing friends or being humiliated by retention, very little of this actually occurred. It seems they anticipated what might go wrong so that they could prepare themselves for the event should it occur.

It was apparent by the rambling discourse from some participants that attention issues continued to plague them. Some participants said they were medicated for the disability, others just noticed it as they progressed through school. Unlike immaturity, attention problems seemed to linger with participants for years.

The four participants who made self-deprecating statements seemed to have moved past those thoughts by the time I interviewed them. They seemed self-assured and confident during the interview.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #1: How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school? More than half of the participants put a positive spin on their retention events. Some were glad they were retained, others understood why and accepted it.

Also, the participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #4: What characteristics of resiliency did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success? Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff (1998) found a connection between emotional well being and academic success. This section illustrated the remarkable resiliency exhibited by the participants, evidenced by their emotional strength. The participants told stories of how they were able to solve problems and overcome challenges. They talked of their self reliance, and many of them exuded self confidence during the interviews.

Resilience. One of the most fascinating characteristics possessed by the participants was resilience. They did not use the term to describe themselves; however, their stories richly illustrated their abilities to adapt in the face of stress.

Reconciling retention. Thirteen participants quickly came to terms with their retention soon after learning they were held back. Some were glad they had been retained, whereas the rest put a positive spin on the event. I asked Emily how she overcame her frustration at the news of being held back in third grade, "I guess because I felt like I was going to be able to relearn it and understand it better."

William realized immediately that being retained would work for him, "I wasn't too

upset because I didn't really have that many friends in kindergarten so... Thought it was another chance to meet some kids."

Two participants, who did not learn of their retention until years later, rationalized being held back. Aliah was not aware until years later that she had been held back in first grade. She talked about her immediate reconciliation with the news when her mother told her, "It was just...like she came straight out with it like...out of nowhere. And I was like, "What? I got held back?" She was like, "Yeah." I was like, "Huh!" After that, I was like, "Well, OK." I just didn't care after that. 'Cause I mean...I guess she did it for a good thing. 'Causeif I would have kept moving on, I still wouldn't know certain stuff." Jacqueline did not realize that she was held back until years later, too. Like Aliah, she quickly came to terms with it, "I'm glad they didn't just pass me to the next grade. I didn't know none of the curriculum."

Two other participants described their resilience. Caroline was quick in the interview to express her positive spin on being held back. "And you just need to keep an open mind when you do that and not let yourself doubt and..." "why am I going through this?" Just look on the positive side of and...some people would be like, "I don't want to go through that." But the grass is always greener on the other side. Well it definitely was...for me." Although she wrestled with being held back, Caroline reported a healthy attitude, "And... sometimes I think..." "Why me? Why did I like have to go through this?" It came out positive in the end. "I'm glad I went through it." Al was upset over being held back in second grade. I asked him how he

overcame his negative feelings. He said, "I just tried to forget about it, you know ...just keep movin' on."

While some participants embraced the retention event, others merely accepted it and moved on. Mandy was one of two participants who expressed some frustration at still being in her senior year when friends had moved on. However, she reconciled her retention when she learned she was being held back in third grade, "I wasn't mad or anything. I just accepted it. 'Cause I knew I was bad at math. And I knew my reading level wasn't like...that high." Jeff, the other senior who said his friends had moved on, reported being angry at the news of his retention. I asked him how he got over his anger, "And finally, I just accepted it. And I guess I decided I would go try again to see if I could prove myself." Hilary reported being held back in 2nd grade because of a serious hearing problem. When I asked her how she came to terms with the retention, she said, "Um, I don't really know. I think it was the best for me. I was slower than all the other kids. And they would read really fast and I would be scared to be called on to read because I was so slow and I didn't want people to make fun of me." Morgan's parents told her during the summer that she would be repeating first grade. I asked her what she meant when she said she just dealt with it, "I just kinda went with it. It was something I had to do. That's how I've always been. I know I have to do it, so I just go with it. I don't pitch a fit, I don't get upset. I just go with it with everything. That's just how I am."

As they reflected on being held back, three other participants talked about how they rationalized the phenomenon. Melissa was held back in fifth grade but rationalized it, "I mean, I figured it would be OK since all my other friends would be

going to the middle school, and they wouldn't know I got held back." Anthony was retained in 4th grade and did not like the idea. However, he reported his reconciliation this way, "And I just had to go with it because my mom...well I knew I needed help and I guess it was the best thing to do at the time anyway." Donna pictured the future as she reconciled her retention, "It's just I thought to myself, one day in life, I'm going to be where those people are so it doesn't matter. I'll eventually catch up to them so that's OK."

Overcoming challenges and barriers. Seven participants talked about working to remove a specific barrier in their school lives. Some had attendance issues in high school, but they came in on Saturdays or during the summer to make up the work in order to graduate. I met Michael in July at his high school after he had accepted his diploma on stage in June. He was making up an incomplete grade for being ill during his last semester. Aliah missed some days during her last semester, too. "I was missing like 20 something days in each class. And I had seven classes. But I made them all up before the year was over with. I made most of them up in two weeks." Although, he graduated with his class in June, Victor needed to make up a math class before starting college in the fall. "Well, I took summer, I was willing to take summer school to catch up."

Some participants struggled academically in one area or another; however, they worked hard to overcome the barrier. Caroline struggled in math all her life; it was the reason her parents held her back in third grade. I asked her about math in high school, "It was still a little bit hard. But this year, I had an awesome math

teacher. I did really, really well. And so..I was able to, I took a placement test and I placed out of my math classes”

Self reliance. Three participants drew intrapersonal strength from their self reliance. They either believed in their abilities or grew to believe in them. Jeff was not happy about being retained and wanted to prove to himself and others that he was able to handle middle school. He said, “I kinda knew I wasn’t ready, and I kinda wanted to take on the challenge anyways.” Joyce seemed to exude self confidence during our interview. She often noted how much more mature she was compared to her peers. “I’m a very passionate person and I want to succeed. And I believe the greatest barrier to success is the fear of failing. So failing...I really think failing is when you stop being willing to try and give an effort. So I will keep trying and I’m not afraid to be knocked down and if I am, I’m encouraged to get up twice as strong.” Kelly struggled in school most of her life and her parents’ divorce during the year she was held back in school made life challenging to her. However, she learned to be self reliant. When I asked her to explain why being retained was good for her, she said, “Cause it showed me I don’t need everybody else to succeed.

Motivation. Some participants were motivated by an internalized fear; others were motivated by an internal strength.

Afraid of being retained again. Being held back once motivated some participants to work harder to succeed for fear of being retained again. While none of these three offered that a second retention was threatened or even mentioned, they seemed to believe that it was a possibility. Michael said, “I just know that I, since I got held back, it just made me like every other it, it made me just push myself harder

and harder to not be able like...I didn't want to be held back again, so I just pushed myself." Melissa used the retention as a motivator, too. She said, "I knew that if I didn't do good, I'd be held back again. And it kind of pushed me to do my best. Try harder and get help when I needed it."

Worked hard. Anthony did not want to be held back in school the first time and lost some self confidence as a result. However, he worked to overcome those feelings. "I just tried really hard. Uh, I tried to do everything I could to pass. I didn't want to fail again. And I did everything in my power that I could to do better than I did." Emily talked about how her mother told the story of Emily working very hard, "And she said that the teacher said that "I've never seen someone try so hard to only make Bs and Cs." Joyce talked about a tough fourth grade teacher who made her work, "Because she pushed kids academically. Like she really wanted you to succeed. And, you know, go beyond the fourth grade level expectations. But I enjoyed her, you know, setting a challenge for me. So being a little harder, I was encouraged by it, more motivated."

Proud of success. Most of the participants talked about their honors classes, advanced placement classes, or awards. However, three of them framed their successes with a sense of pride. Caroline struggled in math off and on throughout school. She sported a wide smile when she said, "I took a placement test and I placed out of my math classes. I never thought I would do that." Al said that being retained doesn't bother him now "because I've come so far in life." Early on in the interview, Hilary talked of her math skills. When I asked her about her successes,

she said she was, "Proud of my math." All of the participants expressed being good at something. However, these three eluded to being proud of their efforts.

Fears. About one third of the participants said they worried about what might happen because of being held back.

Fear of losing friends. Four participants said their biggest anxiety with being held back was losing friends. Although Michael reported making friends easily, he said four different times how being retained made him afraid of losing friends, "OK, I'm just about to lose all my friends that I just gained this year." Just stuff like that that. I don't know. I just didn't want to be friendless." Emily remembered being worried about having friends after she was retained, "I remember saying I know people below me I just hope I'm in class with them." Caroline talked about losing a special friend because of her retention, "We had just gotten to know each other and...I didn't get to go on with my school career. And hang out with her and get to know her even more. As the years went on, that was something that definitely was one of the things that wasn't great because I didn't get to hang out with her any more. Kelly seemed wistful as she spoke about her initial reaction when she learned of her retention, "Cause I figured I lost all my friends. I didn't believe I could make more."

Worried about humiliation. Five participants remembered being worried about suffering from humiliation. While not all of them were worried about the humiliation of being retained, the idea that they worried about what others would think may speak to the capacity for harboring feelings of inadequacy. Emily reported many such fears racing through her mind when she first learned that she

would be held back, “My first thought was what are my friends going to think? I mean they’re going to be 4th graders and I’m going to be a 3rd grader again. Are they going to make fun of me?” Al remembered being worried about seeing his friends the following year, “I wasn’t going to be able to keep going forward, and you know, just having to uh, see all the kids that were you know, in that grade with me next year. Just the fact that them seeing me in a lower grade again.” Kelly said she endured being picked on soon after she was retained and worried about it recurring once she entered middle school, “When I was first going in to middle school, I was like, Oh gosh. It’s going to be back.” Morgan said that she doesn’t talk about her retention much to others, “I’m not embarrassed by it, but I don’t want everyone to know it. I guess I’m still afraid that someone might make fun of me.” Donna was able to avoid the humiliation because her mother moved her to a charter school, “I changed schools because, I guess like humiliation. Like my friends all went on and then I wouldn’t be able to go on and so it would be awkward to be held back.” Joyce was more concerned about people knowing she was raised by her grandparents than knowing she was held back in kindergarten, “And I just didn’t think people would be very accepting and would make fun of me and stuff.”

Being embarrassed. Six participants described feelings of embarrassment from being held back. Mandy briefly talked about her feeling embarrassed when she entered her repeated third grade class on the first day, “Like I know I was embarrassed, I remember that. I just walked in there and didn’t really know anybody.” Although Morgan reported not being embarrassed by the retention now, it seems she was embarrassed at the time, “I was always the oldest kid in the class

and everyone would always ask me why, I was like, “I don’t know.” I knew why, but I never wanted to tell anyone why. I guess, I felt embarrassed, I don’t know. I wouldn’t tell them. I’d be like, “I don’t know why.” I asked Ben how he felt when he walked into his repeated first grade class on the first day of school. He said, “Uh, it was awkward. It was a little bit awkward.” Al reported being embarrassed at being held back, “And you know, it was kind of embarrassing but, I don’t know. It was just, .it was hard. I was more embarrassed then sad.”

Self-deprecating thoughts. Five participants harbored self-deprecating thoughts at some points in their lives. Hilary talked about having to go to a separate place to receive extra help in school, “. . .because I kind of felt stupid when I had to go there.” Kelly said being retained made her feel bad about herself, “I felt like I wasn’t smart enough to make it.” The same feelings occurred to Anthony, “I didn’t really feel that great about myself because I didn’t pass. I felt like I wasn’t all that smart.” Dawn was held back in kindergarten and said this about herself, “Um I kinda blamed myself, well like, ‘I did something wrong.’ I failed.” Joyce talked openly about being left by her mother and adopted by her paternal grandparents, “And I struggled with it for many years. I went through a time where I blamed myself. I just thought I had done something wrong.”

Attention problems. Six participants said they struggled with paying attention in school. Some said they were medically diagnosed. Jacqueline talked about having trouble focusing, “Because it would take me a long time to get the um, it would take me a long time to get the work down. And like people could talk and work at the same time, but I have to have just like silence. Like it can’t be no kind

of talking.” Al reported improving in math when he began to focus during his second time in second grade, “Once you start paying attention to something you don’t really know nothing about then, you know, eventually it just starts coming to you and you learn more about it.” Ben blamed his lack of attention for his retention in first grade, “I don’t think I was ready to move on because, again, I didn’t pay a whole lot of attention until the second year of first grade.” Demetrius was held back in first grade, but realized he was struggling in school in third grade. He said this about how he realized he was struggling, “Always dazing outside and not paying attention.” Anthony struggled with his diagnosed attention deficit, “When I was in elementary school, I had a really hard time paying attention. I was always distracted by something. It could be the littlest thing.” Morgan was also diagnosed, “I had ADHD. I went to an ADHD doctor. I couldn’t sit there and read, do your 20 minutes of reading.”

Immaturity. Five participants discussed their immaturity. Most of them claimed not to remember much about being immature, but they were told about this by their parents. Donna was one of them as she explained, “I got held back in second grade because my teacher told my parents that I wasn’t mature enough to go on. Which I thought was ridiculous.” Melissa said she was told about her immaturity, “Cause I wasn’t like I guess emotionally and mentally with like academics and maturity. I guess that’s how you explain it.” Joyce talked about her separation anxiety her first time in kindergarten, “But my parents felt that I wasn’t emotionally ready to continue to the first grade because I would cry every day wanting to go home. I didn’t like being separated from my mother.” Emily said this

about the reason for her non-promotion, “My mom felt that I wasn’t mature enough, um mentally to go on to the next grade.” Jeff was the only participant who said he had some insight to his lack of readiness, “Like as much as everybody said I wasn’t ready. I kinda knew I wasn’t ready, and I kinda wanted to take on the challenge anyways.”

School Facilitation

“I remember the school was being built and we would drive by and I was like, Oh they’re building me a school! So...I always thought that the school was being built for me.”

-Joyce

This section represents the largest number of coded responses, which total 202. More than half of the coded responses were about teachers. Themes and subclusters are indicated in Table 4. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The components of this section and the themes that emerged are illustrated in Figure 6. Interpretation of the evidence includes a summation of the themes and answers to research questions. Evidence is presented by documented examples of direct quotes from the participants that illustrate themes and subclusters.

Table 4

Themes and Subclusters for School Facilitation

Themes	Subcluster	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Teacher support		105	21
	Helpful teacher	37	15
	Liked my teacher	33	13
	Received extra academic support	23	12
	Relationship with teacher	15	9
Academic success		41	17
	Good in a particular content area	17	13
	Advanced placement or honors classes	12	9
	Did well in school	8	6
	Struggled at first, then improved	4	6
Liked School Extracurricular involvement		17	10
		39	20
	Sports	17	12
	Other clubs or groups	22	12

Figure 6. Themes for School Facilitation

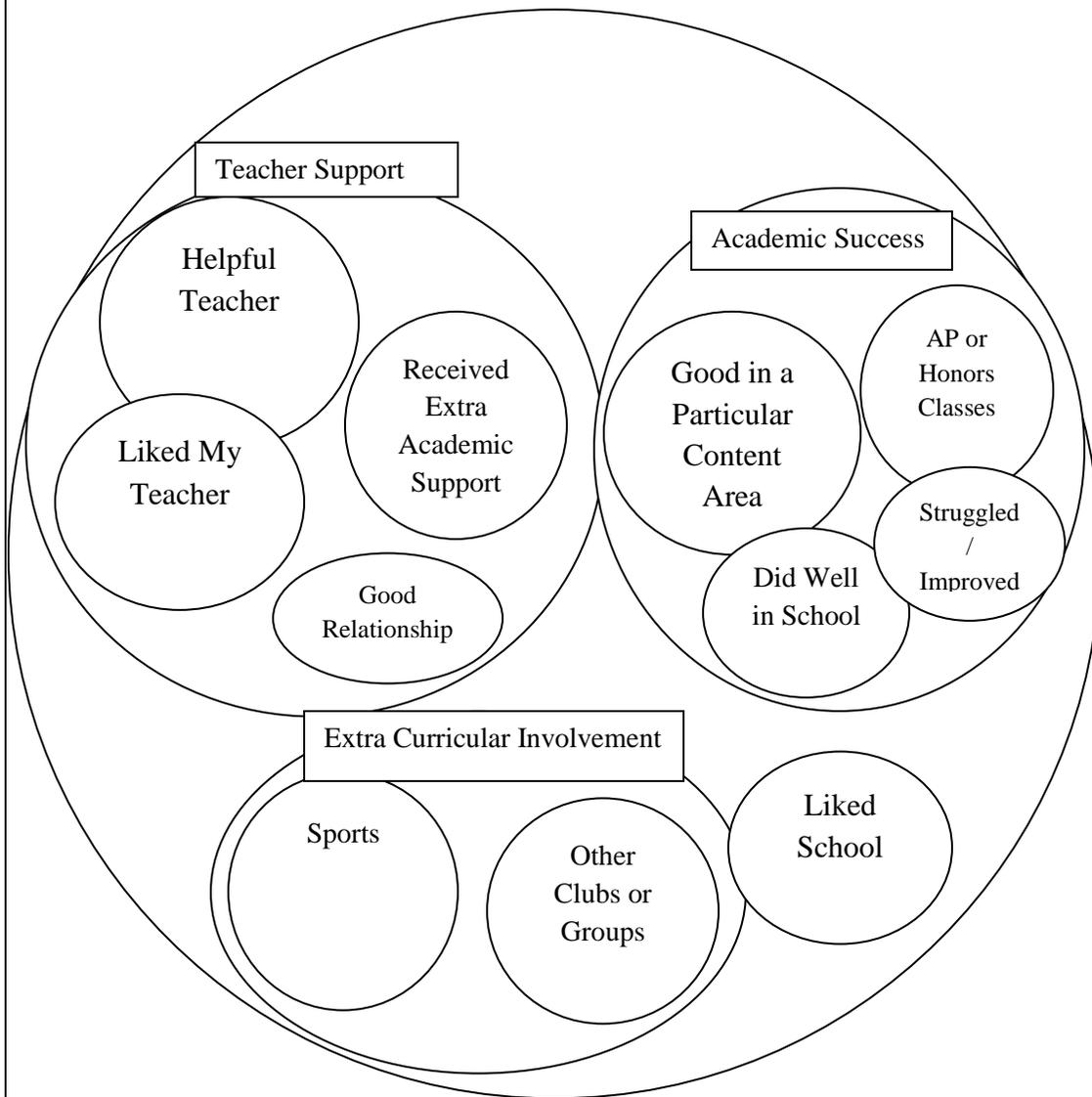


Figure 6. Strengths of themes and subclusters are shown by relative size of each circle. Strengths are based on the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response.

Interpretation of School Facilitation

Teacher support was the dominant theme for this section. I specifically asked the participants to tell me about their teachers. This may be why there were so many coded responses for this section about teachers. Nevertheless, most of the

participants gave examples about how their teachers helped them, made learning fun, and provided extra academic support beyond the regular classroom activities.

Several participants mentioned the personal relationship they had with their teachers and how important that was to them. On the whole, the participants gave very few negative responses regarding teachers.

About half of the participants mentioned liking school. Again, I solicited responses about the good parts of school. This could be the reason so many participants said they liked elementary school. However, the participants who indicated they liked school supported their opinions with documented examples.

Most of the participants talked about having success in school. Some said they struggled in one content area, but were successful in another content area. Others said they struggled early, but were successful later. Close to half of the participants said they were involved in honors classes or advanced placement classes in high school. Success in school was a prominent theme for this section.

Almost all of the participants stated they were involved in extra-curricular activities in high school. Many played team sports. Theatre and other clubs were just as popular as sports. Some participants were involved in both. The participants who talked about their involvement in sports or clubs seemed to express a more positive attitude about school in general. Extra-curricular activities in high school appeared to be a prominent theme for this section.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #2: "What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school?" As indicated,

most of the participants made positive statements about their elementary school teachers. They liked school, and many of them were good at school in one area or another. After-school clubs or sports seemed to bind them in a positive way to their high school environments. In general, school was a positive experience for the participants.

In addition to positive experiences in elementary school, most of the participants were involved in extra-curricular activities during high school. Sports seemed to be an important part of several participants' lives. Several of them indicated they would continue playing sports in college. Clubs, music groups, and theatre emerged often in the data, as well. These extra-curricular activities appeared to bind students to high school.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #3: "What are the high school seniors' perceptions of how transactions between those environments over time shaped them into the people they are now?" Because the participants experienced success in some aspect of school, they seemed to feel included in their environments. Some research indicated a transactional relationship between success in school and positive social inclusion (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Whether success came from a specific content area or an extra-curricular organization, it seemed to have a positive effect on the participants' sense of belonging. In turn, their involvement in a team sport or club made a positive impact on their perspective of school.

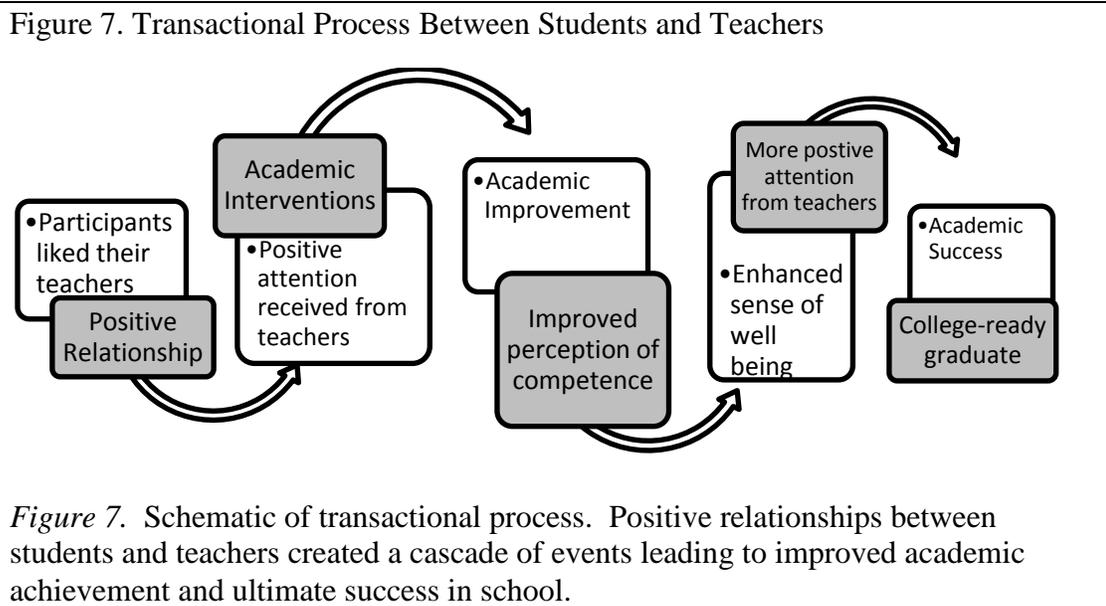
In addition to social inclusion, another transactional process involving school success may have occurred. Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff, (1998) suggested a

transactional process between students' perceptions of their competence and the history of feedback from teachers. As the participants progressed through school and experienced more success through academic interventions provided by teachers for whom they felt some affection, their perceptions of their competence became more favorable. In turn, the students' self perceptions affected their sense of well being and made them more likely to be given positive attention from teachers. As more positive attention, especially in the way of academic interventions, was given by teachers, the participants experienced more success in school. This transactional process is illustrated in Figure 7.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #4: "What characteristics of resiliency, if any, did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success?" Research has shown that students who perceived themselves to be successful were shown to possess resiliency characteristics. In addition, resilient students liked school more than non-resilient students (Roberts, 2003). Most of the participants in this study talked about having success in at least one academic content area. They tended to exhibit themselves in a positive light as they explained their aptitude in that area. In addition, most of the participants had a favorable perception of school.

According to Woklow and Ferguson (2001), resilient children tend to foster trusting relationships with adults. As trusting relationships are formed, support systems are created for the children. The participants in this study talked favorably about their teachers. Participants said their teachers cared about them, helped them, and gave them extra support. Several participants talked about their personal

relationships with their teachers. The positive relationships between the participants and their teachers clearly contributed to the protective factors for resiliency.



Teacher support. Participants talked about their favorite teachers, how teachers were helpful, and how their relationships with teachers made a positive impact on them. Examples were given to show how teachers provided extra academic support, and how teachers pushed their students to succeed.

Helpful teacher. Participants described teachers being helpful in several ways. Teachers helped academically, and they helped students cope with life’s problems. Also, they helped obtain services for some participants. Mandy was not forthcoming with much information, however, she said that she liked the teacher who retained her in third grade. I asked her why she liked this teacher. She said, “Uh, she was helpful.” Michael did not remember many teachers, but he did remember one. He did not know why he could remember his third grade teacher but he said, “She used to help me. I don’t know; she was helpful. If I didn’t know

something, she was right there to guide me and teach me.” Demetrius, too, had trouble remembering his teachers, but two stood out to him, “They really helped me with like my work and stuff.” Anthony was retained in fourth grade and seemed grateful to his second fourth grade teacher, “But she helped me a lot. Uh, she knew, I guess she knew I struggled with the reading and writing. Um, but uh, I guess I got through 4th grade because she helped me a lot.”

Three participants talked about life’s struggles during their elementary school years and how teachers helped them. Jacqueline had a difficult home life as a child, but memories of her teachers were positive, “I know my teachers were very helpful during that time.” One teacher stood out to her, “And um, she kinda just took me underneath her wing when I needed to talk to somebody or when I was having a rough day, she would come talk to me and make me happier. Like I could be mad and she would make me un-mad and yeah. She helped me a lot.” Another teacher helped Jacqueline in a different way, “And Ms. Burns was a person who got me a Big Sister.” Kelly indicated that she did not remember much about elementary school, but she remembered her third grade teacher the year after her parents divorced, “Cause. I don’t know, she helped me through the whole thing.” Dawn had a rough beginning in kindergarten because many classmates made fun of her. Her second year in kindergarten was much better because of her teacher, “She was very nice and um, she really helped me and was very involved in getting me medical attention and making sure there was no bullying.”

Several participants talked about how their teachers cared for them. Ben said this about his teachers, “I had a bunch of great teachers in elementary school.

They all cared about me a lot. I could tell because they helped me a lot. They helped me make it through elementary school.” Hilary indicated her teachers in elementary school influenced her more than anyone. I asked her to explain and she said, “Um they would always help me in school. Like especially, ’cause I think they knew that I just had surgery on my ears and, like I had tubes put in my ears. And they would always sit down with me when we had to read or they would not call on me because they knew I was scared.”

Liked my teacher. Aside from being helpful, 13 different participants referenced “liking” some teachers. Four participants mentioned liking the teachers who retained them. Emily seemed to have mixed feelings about the teacher who held her back in third grade, “The teacher that held me back, she was, I was always really scared of her, but um, after like, I guess I was one of the students who really did like her. I was scared of her, but I really liked her. I mean, she got the work done and she knew what she was doing. Um she just, she was a really good teacher.” I asked Mandy which elementary teachers stood out to her. She said that the teacher who retained her in third grade stood out to her. I asked her why, “I liked her. I remember that.” Donna also like the teacher who held her back, “She was really nice. I do know that. I just, cause she used to tell us stories all the time and we actually, I remember this, ’cause I don’t know why, she always had pet hamsters. She was a really nice teacher.” Morgan credits her teacher for the smooth transition into her retention year. She had the same teacher twice, “I was held back in first grade. And they sent me with the same teacher. They liked her so much. She was actually my all time favorite. She still holds to be my favorite teacher.”

Two participants mentioned liking their second teacher from their retained grade better than the teacher who held them back. Caroline seemed to like her second teacher much more than the teacher who retained her in first grade, “She had a one-on-one relationship with me. She was able to connect to all of her students and we learned as a whole class. And then, she would talk to us individually and just do a lot of stuff that my other teacher didn’t.” William liked his second teacher more, too, “I always remember I liked my second one better than my first one. She just seemed nicer.”

Participants seemed to like teachers for a variety of reasons. Some teachers held parties, others had class pets. Some teachers were nice, others were strict. Most of the participants who liked teachers referenced their teachers’ competence and making learning fun. Aliah seemed to combine two attributes as she referenced a teacher, “And like we always used to have parties in her class. But she taught us a lot, I think. She was the best teacher out of all.” Using dogs to facilitate the curriculum made one of William’s teachers stand out, “She would always bring her dogs in and whatever. Pretty fun. And then we got to have our own little names for them and collar tags we got to pick out. It was kinda like a partner thing. It was pretty fun.” Emily appreciated learning from one of her favorite teachers, “She was really nice, she was very understanding and she was easy to learn from. She knew what she was doing. She knew how to explain it.” Having fun and learning seemed to be important to Caroline as she spoke of her favorite teacher, “She made learning fun. And she showed us different things, and just made sure that we understood

what was going on. And we always did hands-on stuff, too, 'cause we were in kindergarten. But that always helped me learn and understand things better.”

Like Caroline’s favorite teacher, some teachers stood out because they made learning fun. Mandy registered for high school classes because she liked a particular instructor, “I mean like everyone’s always told me that agri-science is like a fun class and you get to a bunch of stuff like outside and stuff so I was like, ‘Yeah, I’ll take it.’ And so then after that I was like, ‘I guess I’ll take horticulture.’ And so I took that. And now I’m going into Horticulture II and Animal Science I next semester with him.” Having fun in school made a teacher memorable for Emily, “And so we got to do a whole bunch of fun things. I remember we took apart a watermelon and we would spit seeds to see how far we could spit the seeds. Um we always had a lot of fun.”

Attention to learning seemed to be an important quality in likeable teachers. Joyce appreciated her teacher’s attention to rigor, “Because she pushed kids academically. Like she really wanted you to succeed. And, you know, go beyond the fourth grade level expectations. But I enjoyed her, you know, setting a challenge for me. Because I’ve always been passionate about learning. So having being a little harder, I was encouraged by it, more motivated.” Melissa also appreciated a strict teacher, “And she was a very good teacher. She would help us keep organized. She was very strict. I think I needed the strictness of a teacher.” Teachers who pushed ranked as Victor’s favorite teachers, “But let’s just say, they pushed you. They kind of pushed you a little bit to strive. That type of story. To be honest, the reason why they’re on the top. Every teacher that is on my top list is pretty much because of

that.” Anthony’s favorite teacher recognized his correct answers with candy, “I was never shy to answer questions. And there, if you answered a question right or if you wrote something on the board or did something like that, she would give you candy as a reward.”

Some participants said they disliked a teacher at the time, but grew to appreciate how much they were pushed. I asked Ben to tell me about the teachers who stood out to him and he remembered several, one of whom didn’t seem to be his favorite at the time, “Me and my 5th grade teacher butted heads a lot. I mean, I knew she cared. She just wanted to help me be successful one day and help me get through. And now that I understand that. I look back and I kinda feel terrible about how me and her butted heads so much. She was just trying to help me out in the long run.” Dawn said she did not like being pushed by a teacher, but credits this teacher for laying a strong academic foundation, “My 4th grade teacher, I didn’t like her at the time. I thought she was too harsh. But, honestly, she is the reason I’m such a...so much better academics right now. And she kinda took it a step further and gave us more homework and more assignments. And I HATED it at the time. I couldn’t stand her. And now, it’s kinda like, it’s why I have to do my homework as soon as I get home. I have to do well on tests. I have to make As.” William may have liked learning from dogs more than homework, but he referenced another teacher who stood out to him, “She was kinda strict. But she kinda got me in line in school. Stopped playing around and started making me do my homework.”

Received extra academic support. Twelve participants talked about how their teachers helped them academically by providing extra support. Some teachers

helped before or after school. Melissa credits one of her middle school teachers for helping her with math. “I struggled a little bit in math still, but she always helped. And I went to after school tutoring with her a lot.” Emily talked about a special project she and her friend worked on and how her teacher helped them after school, “The teacher helped us out a little bit. She would come with us to go measure horses and stuff like that.” One of Heather’s favorite teachers was the teacher who held her back in third grade. According to Heather, this teacher helped her outside of the school day, “She worked with us, too. But it was like a morning. We got there early.” Kelly also received help from her teacher beyond the school day, “Like for like vocabulary tests or something, her and me would stay after school and play games with words so I could get ‘em.” Joyce stayed after school to get help with reading. She said, “I remember I stayed after and they taught me strategies on how to read selections and I’m not like below average now. I’m normal.”

Several retainees were pulled from their classrooms and given extra support. Jacqueline described the extra help, “And sometimes, I would have to go out in the hallway or there would be an extra teacher in the room where I’m at.” Heather remembered receiving extra help as she illustrated, “There was like another teacher. I don’t remember her name. She would like pull a certain group out because there were more kids that got held back. I don’t know if they were held back for reading, but she would pull us out of class and take us like into a separate room. Work with us on math or reading..or whatever she felt the need to work with us that day.” Kelly had a similar experience, “I remember there were some times like I’d have this uh, lady would take me out of class and help me with whatever I needed. In that period

of time. And that helped a lot. It was like a group of us that went out. She'd come every week and we'd go out and we'd talk to her about what we didn't understand and what not and she'd help us with it." Melissa was held back in fifth grade and described this extra help, "Like we went over reading skills one day and, we went twice a week. Reading skills one day and then math skills. Whatever we were struggling in. And she'd help us with homework."

One participant talked about receiving extra help before she was retained and after she was retained in first grade. Morgan said, "I remember that I did have this, I don't know what you call these teachers. But in kindergarten they have 'em too, they would pull me out of class with a whole bunch of a few other kids, like during play time. And they would do other things with me, I guess, like flash cards and all that stuff."

Relationship with teacher. Relationships with teachers seemed to be important to several participants as they referenced connecting with their teachers on a personal level. Caroline defined this connection, "'Cause most of my teachers that I've had a relationship with, they've gotten to know me, not just for me as a student and how I worked, but personally. And that's what really makes the relationship between a student and a teacher." Aliah's favorite teacher seemed to make a connection with students, "We just got along better than the other teachers. Like she understands students." Morgan felt such a strong connection with her teacher, she convinced her to try out for a part in the ballet, "And I went back to her and I would visit her most every morning. And I would talk to her. And I told her about and I'm like, 'And anyone can be a party mom.' I talked about it a lot. She came up, I didn't

realize it, and she came up and she was my party mom in the scene. She was my party mom!”

As they spoke of teachers they liked, some participants mentioned they maintained a relationship with their elementary teachers over time. Victor’s kindergarten teacher was one of his many favorites, “I still remember her and she actually gave me a recommendation for the college I’m going to right now.” Caroline described her favorite teacher as sweet, “My favorite, I think would have to be, guess my kindergarten teacher. I still see her from time to time. She was really sweet.” Morgan mentioned having conversations with the teacher who retained her, “I know I could still talk to her. Like when I’m at work, I see her drive through sometimes and I’ll sit there and talk to her. She’s just always been my favorite teacher.”

Three participants talked about the importance of a relationship with their teachers during a vulnerable time in their lives. Teachers seemed to make up much of Jacqueline’s support system when she needed it most. She remembers having a close relationship with one, “And she was the one that I knew I could go to talk to.” Al remembers his teachers because of their personal relationship, “I remember them because it’s just, I had that much of a connection with them. You know you have just some teachers that you can click with. And that’s a good thing they’re around helping you. I guess that’s how I kinda felt with them in elementary school. You know, it’s just like they knew I was a troubled student and, you know, I tried my hardest and you know, they were there for me. So you know, if you meet somebody good, you’ll never forget them.” Joyce said she needed a relationship with her

kindergarten teacher because her parents left her to be raised by her grandparents, “I loved her; she was very nurturing at times. I needed a little bit more attention than most kids because of my family situation. And um, she really went beyond the expectations of an elementary school teacher to make sure I felt, you know, safe at school. Because she knew of my family situation.”

Dawn expressed her opinion about the importance of teachers connecting on a personal level with their students in order to make important decisions, “I talked to all my teachers. All my teachers know my personality very well. I believe any teacher should know their students’ personality. Who they are and what kind of student they are. But if it’s just a student who comes into your class, does their work and leaves, you have no relationship with that student, you have no friendship. There isn’t you know, they take up a desk. Therefore, you can’t really speak for that student. You can’t speak in such a great life decision as in holding someone back.

Academic Success. This theme is composed of four different subclusters describing the participants’ academic success. Eighteen different participants are represented in this theme.

Advanced placement or honors courses. Seven participants were enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school and/or took Honors Classes. While math continued to challenge Emily, she was quick to tell me about her AP courses, “I took AP classes this year. I did AP science and AP government.” Joyce talked about pushing herself and being successful in school, “I’ve always been an honor student. Besides one regular class, which was a history class my freshman year. I’ve taken all honors. And I’m currently in three AP classes. Um, I’ve really

gone beyond and pushed myself in taking advanced levels of science classes. Anatomy, physiology honors. Biomedical technology. Sports medicine. Chemistry honors. Um, AP Biology.” Dawn mentioned briefly her honors work, “I am an artist and a writer. I’m in Honors Art here.” Hilary, too, seemed to be proud of her success in school, “I’m pretty good at math. Um, I don’t get bad grades, honestly. Right now I have psychology honors, and um, English III honors, but a lot of my classes in high school have been honors.”

Two participants talked about being dually enrolled in a community college during their high school years. Myron was dually enrolled, and he talked about his college life more than his senior year in high school, “I’m just taking two classes here right now and everything else at the community college.” Melissa had been dually enrolled since her junior year and expected to have a license in cosmetology by the time she graduated from high school, “I take college classes at the community college for cosmetology. I’ll have my license, but I’ll have to keep going to get the full license and everything. I’ll have a semester after high school or two semesters.”

Did well in school. Although they had not taken AP or Honors courses, other participants talked about doing well in school. I asked Michael if he had any academic challenges, but he replied, “Anything I tried to do, I pretty much accomplished.” Aliah seemed to think that elementary school was less of a challenge than high school, “I think elementary was the easiest of my years. Like I did really good in elementary.” Despite her challenging home life, Jacqueline seemed to be proud of her academic success, “But my grades are pretty good. My senior year, I pulled them up. My first semester, I got all As and Bs.” I asked

Caroline about her academic successes and she said, “English, well, reading. And then math was pretty easy for me up until fourth grade. ‘Cause it was pretty simple. And then, um, a history class, but that was pretty easy, too. I think, when I was little, I was reading above my grade level.” Al reported having a tough time in elementary school because of his behavior, but I asked him if he thought anything was academically easy. He said, “Most of the reading.” I asked him if he enjoyed reading now. He responded, “Yes ma’am.”

Good in a particular content area. While Al, Aliah, and Caroline were the only participants to talk specifically about being good at reading, nine other participants said they were good in math. William credits his family for his mathematical abilities, “It just came to me. Most of my family is good at math so I guess I got the genes for it.” Hilary was excited to tell me about her math strategy, “I learned to like divide and multiply in different ways like lattice. Do you know lattice? I always do my math, my multiplication like that. I like it, but then teachers up here when I was doing algebra and stuff, they didn’t really approve of it. ‘Cause they said that it takes too long. But I think it takes me like 5 seconds.” Myron said math was easy in the early years, but it became more challenging as the years progressed, “I don’t know, it just got harder as time goes on. So before I was struggling, it was 10 times easier when I was a human calculator. Yes when I was like really young. I could do things other kids couldn’t do at the time with math.” The other participants answered with short responses when I asked about their best academic areas:

Michael: “I want to say math.”

Jacqueline: “Math came easy. It’s still my favorite subject. Except for geometry.”

Donna: “I think I was pretty good at math when I was in second grade.”

Kelly: “My math classes were pretty easy.”

Melissa: “I’m really good in math now.”

Anthony: “...but my favorite subject was always math”

Three participants spoke of their writings skills. Emily said she has always loved to write. Dawn gave me copies of some her work, which she hopes to publish some day. Jacqueline offered to give me copies of her poetry. She said, “I love writing. Like I write a lot of poetry. It’s mostly about feelings. I put like trees and stuff into it, but it’s got some type of feeling behind it. It helps me release some of my anger and sadness, stuff like that.”

Struggled at first, then improved. Although they may have struggled in an academic area early, some participants managed to improve, and turned the challenge into a success. Jacqueline explained this phenomena as she talked about her reading, “Um, it would be hard for me to read when there’s people talking and stuff like. And that’s another reason why I hated reading. But now, if you put, if I get a good book, I could just sit there and read all day. But if it’s a book that I have to read, then, I just can’t, I can’t get into it like I want to. I just recently got a library card.” Melissa reported struggling in math, but received help in middle school from her math teacher, “I struggled a little bit in math still, but she always helped. And I went to after school tutoring with her a lot. I’m really good in math now.” Caroline also found math challenging, but managed to improve, “It was still a little bit hard.

But this year, I had an awesome math teacher. I did really, really well. And so, I was able to, I took a placement test and I placed out of my math classes.” Joyce received help in reading, “I remember I stayed after and they taught me strategies on how to read selections and I’m not like below average now. I’m normal. And I still make A’s in my English classes.”

Liked school. Ten different participants shared fond memories of school, most of which pertained to learning. Emily remembered her class putting the Big Bad Wolf on trial. She said, “We actually got to use a real courtroom. They let us use one of their small courthouses and we got to use an actual judge. We had kids’ parents who were lawyers.” Several participants talked fondly of elementary school and expressed similar statements as this one by Morgan, “I liked pretty much all of my elementary school. There was nothing negative about it.”

Extracurricular involvement. All but two participants talked about being involved in a school-sponsored club or sport. The two who did not mention being involved in school-sponsored organizations were Myron and Aliah. At the time of the interview, Myron was enrolled in only two classes at the high school; the balance of his schedule was at the community college. Aliah said she concentrated on business classes. Twelve participants said they were involved in a team sport at school. All of the clubs or team sports required after school commitments.

Sports. The athletes seemed to express pride in their accomplishments. Jacqueline talked about basketball, “I got Player of the Game. This was my senior year, I got Player of the Game three times. I got All Area Team. Um, I got um, Most, what was that award? Player of the Game! And um, Most, Oh what’s that

word I'm looking for, not Most Valuable Player, but, oh Most Improved. 'Cause junior year, I mean I got points but my senior year, I was just good." Michael, who seemed to revolve his life around sports, talked about his 10th grade year, "I stopped playing football I think that year. And I kept playing basketball." Hilary and Demetrius played basketball, too. Demetrius talked about being involved in basketball at one time. Being new to his current school, plus working after school, his involvement in sports was limited, "Football, basketball, and track. But I'm not doing football and basketball this year. I'm just going to do track." Al and Ben both played football. Al talked about his love for the game, "I've played since elementary school. So I've been in football since about, um, 13." He talked about his position as fullback, "You actually get to run the ball and hit people at the same time. So it works itself out." Ben talked about football and other sports, "I try to get as involved as I can. I like to show school spirit so I pretty much been everywhere. I did track and field freshman year. I've played football since sophomore year. I've played football since sophomore year and then I've been the basketball manager, the baseball manager, the wrestling manager. I've done it all. Not much I haven't done." Anthony, too, was very involved in his high school's team sports, "I do track and field. I'm a discus and shotput thrower. Um, I've done a lot of things. I've done football."

Other sports included golf, softball, swimming, track, snow skiing, ultimate Frisbee, and soccer. Caroline talked of the benefits of playing golf, "I was on the women's golf team. And I actually lettered in golf. And, learned what it meant to be part of a team. I have a lot of fun doing that. And sometimes it's good for anger,

too, 'cause you can just hit the ball real hard." Melissa played softball during her freshman year. In addition to track and soccer, Donna was on the swim team during high school and talked about choosing colleges based on her love for the sport, "But I think it would be cool to go there. They even have a swim team and swimming's probably my number one sport." Joyce articulated the benefits she received from high school sports, "I swam for 2 years, my freshman and sophomore year. I am a varsity runner, all 4 years for cross country. I currently am the captain for the junior varsity and varsity team. And I made it to the state level all three years and I am in the process of making it to the state level again. My track, I've been to state twice. And I'm already talking to coaches and stuff about being the captain of the distance part for track this year. If I go to a smaller college, I do want to run. I love the sport and I'm not ready to give it up. But if I go to a bigger school, like Chapel Hill or somewhere, I will not be running, just intramural." Victor held several extracurricular interests, and he talked about his sports fondly, "I like skiing in the winter. I was part of the team back in high school." Apparently, high school didn't offer all that Victor wanted in sports so he helped organized another sport, "Ultimate Frisbee. Well we started a club. Well a friend started a club. It was for a senior project. But I joined in. It only started last year. It was my junior year."

Although they were not part of a high school team, two participants talked about the importance of sports in their lives. William talked about his love for basketball, "I love to play basketball." I asked him if he tried out for the high school team. He said, "Nah. Too short. And our guards are the best in the county. I kinda got into basketball a little too late." I asked him if he played at all and he replied,

“Yeah. Street ball and sometimes a team at the WMCA.” Morgan talked about being active in sports in her community, “I rowed crew. I did that in 7th grade. I quit that for, I guess, a year and a half. And I was like, this past summer, I missed it. I turned 18 so I went to the adults club. Where they’re pretty relaxed, they just go out and row. Every weekend. 8 AM!”

Other clubs or groups. Theater and other extra-curricular activities were mentioned by several participants. Three participants talked about how being involved in theater in high school changed them. Caroline described her transformation, “I was so shy. And then I started coming out of my shell a little bit in Theater II. But this year, I just completely broke away and took on a character role that I never thought I’d play. It was a narrator. And uh, one of the girls I go to church with, she was like, ‘I can’t believe you talk that much!’ because I’m always so quiet. And my teacher even was like so proud of me at that moment that I just completely did something that was just amazing.” Kelly talked about developing her organizational skills through theater, “I’m normally her stage manager. I help her run the show.” I asked her what she liked about it, and she said, “Just being able to communicate with all different people.” Anthony said he loves to dance and is on a competition skate team with his family. He talked about how theater has helped him, “Like I used to be shy when I was little, but I used to not talk to anybody. But theater has helped me out a lot. ‘Cause I’m actually overcoming that and I can actually be in front of people and like speak in front of a class and it’s not really that hard anymore. But it used to be when I was little.”

Other extra-curricular activities included clubs such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), a community service club, music, and Beta Club among others. Emily seemed to enjoy talking about her videography and how it helped the soccer team win games. “I videotaped boys soccer for a year. They needed someone to videotape the guys. And they actually ended up going to state the first year I started videotaping. It was a lot of fun. I actually want to go into film.” Victor became animated when he talked about his interest in astronomy, “You ever hear of PARI? Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute? There’s a summer science session in which high school students would be allowed to participate in the study of, in this case, was about the moon. About near earth objects, asteroids, I’ll say that. How they affect the moon. Between uh, freshman and sophomore summer. I was part of that for about a week.” Heather joined a club to help her community, “I did have CCLA last year. It goes toward your graduation thing. But I don’t remember what it stands for. It’s like you go out into the community and like help.” Mandy and Jeff were a part of FFA. Mandy downplayed an award she received as part of FFA, “In FFA, I got that Whole Green Hand to Green thing, but that’s not really smart. You don’t have to be smart to do that.” Jeff talked about his involvement in FFA, “I design the t-shirts for ‘em. I’ve been in it since 9th grade. Because, you know, a bunch of my buddies, my sister’s friends, were in it and they told me I needed to join. Well, when I joined, I just fell in love with it. I just love animal science and horticulture.”

Donna and Heather talked about music. Donna mentioned her involvement with the arts in school, “I like chorus a lot. It’s fun. And then I have like art. Art’s fun, too. I like drawing and painting and stuff. It’s fun. I also like chorus ‘cause I

like the piano and I watch my teacher play the piano.” It took more encouragement for Heather to talk about her music.

Heather: I play the piano.

Christine: Seriously? Do you take lessons?

Heather: I used to.

Christine: What kind of music do you play?

Heather: Um..Gospel.

Christine: Do you play in church?

Heather: Um Hmm

Christine: Do you play by ear or do you read notes?

Heather: I read notes.

Christine: Good for you. Do you sing, too?

Heather: No. I can, but I choose not to.

Christine: OK. How long have you been playing the piano?

Heather: 6 years.

Two participants talked about their involvement with extra-curricular activities which required academic skills. Joyce talked about her memberships, “I’m on the National Honor Society. This is two years. I was in the Beta Club all middle school, and I guess that continues into high school. Um, I am in the National Honor Society of High School Scholars. I’m in the process of becoming a board member of the National Honor Society.” Dawn talked a lot about her extra-curricular involvement, “I’m in Anime club all four years. It’s a Japanese style of cartoons. It sort of infuses our style of cartoon with a lot of Japanese tradition. We watch

animated cartoons and we talk about Japanese culture, the Japanese language, even though I'm awful at speaking Japanese. This is the first year I'm doing literary magazine. It's great. I'm mainly going to be doing photography. I do a lot of photography and submitting my artwork. This year, we're going to try to do 100 pages. And we do, it's a full layout and students' writing and just a wonderful collage of talent from our school. I wrote a poem, well no, it's a speech, last year, about bullying. And around that, the creators of the literary magazine created a show. It's where a student can get up there and express their emotions through poetry, writing, dancing, or acting."

Mandy illustrated the importance of extra-curricular activities in binding students to high school as she spoke of cheerleading. I asked her how long she had been cheering, and she answered, "Since I was six. I coach it now." Before that, Mandy hinted that she didn't try as hard as she should have in school. She went on, "I just don't like school. I never have. Only reason I came here is to cheer. I cheered my freshman and sophomore year. Football and then basketball last season. Then this year I didn't MAKE it. So I don't even want to be here anymore." Mandy may have been harboring disparaging feelings for some time or she may have been having a bad day on the day of the interview. Nevertheless, I alerted her counselor after the interview.

School Barriers

"Sometimes the work could be like extra hard for me. Like I would be the slowest getting everything settled into my mind."

-Jacqueline

Although this section represents nearly half the number of coded responses than that of School Facilitation, School Barriers is an important component in understanding the participants' perspectives of being retained. Coded responses for this section total 105. Themes and subclusters are indicated in Table 5. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The components of this section and the themes that emerged are illustrated in Figure 8. Interpretation of the evidence includes a summation of the themes and answers to research questions. Evidence is presented by direct quotes from the participants which illustrate themes and subclusters.

Table 5

Themes and Subclusters for School Barriers

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subcluster</i>	<i>Number of Coded Responses</i>	<i>Number of Participants in the Responses</i>
Academic difficulty		61	20
	Struggled in school	17	13
	Reading difficulty	22	12
	Math difficulty	22	11
Teachers	Disliked teacher who retained me	8	3
	Disliked other teacher	9	8
	Teacher did not like me	4	2
Same thing, second time around		8	7
Attention difficulty		10	6
Policy issues		5	5

Figure 8. Themes and Subclusters for School Barriers

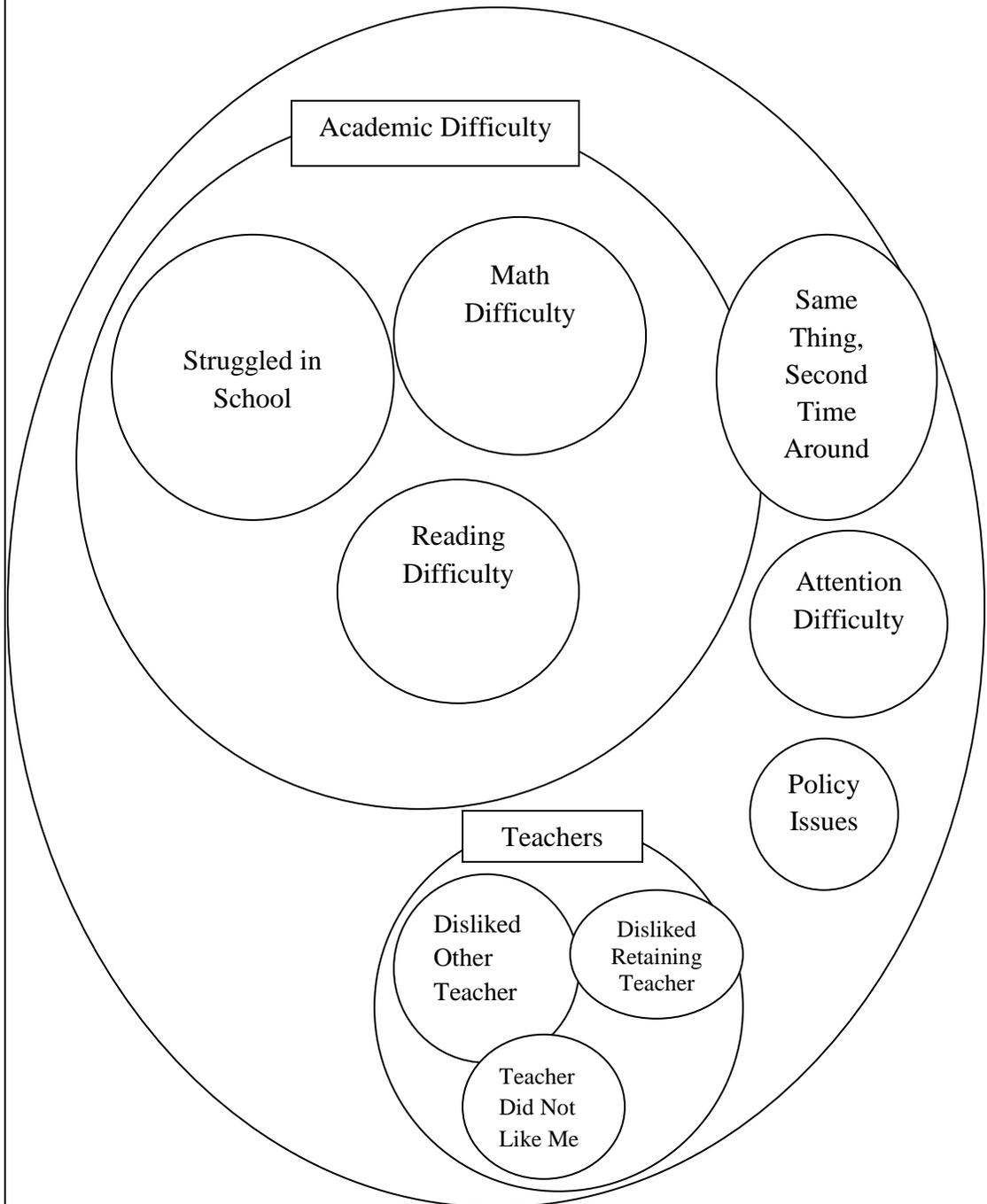


Figure 8. Strengths of themes and subclusters are shown by relative size of each circle. Strengths are based on the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response.

Interpretation of School Barriers

Academic difficulty was the dominant theme in this section. All but two participants remembered struggling in school. Half of the participants struggled in math and half of them struggled in reading. Three participants reported having difficulty in both. Of the nine participants who indicated they struggled in math early in their educational careers, three overcame their difficulties. Of the twelve participants who indicated they struggled in reading, eight seemed to have overcome their difficulties. One participant made no comments about his current level of competence in reading.

Not liking teachers was another school barrier experienced by several participants. While almost half of the participants mentioned a teacher they did not like, only three participants said they did not like the teacher who held them back. The negative perception of their teacher may have been a contributing factor in these participants' retention. However, none of the three participants attributed their retention to the teacher.

Policies regarding retention may have been the cause for holding some participants back, however, only four participants indicated as much. One participant was held back due to excessive absences. Seven participants were retained in a testing grade, but only three attributed the retention event to failing the state exam. In fact, all but one of the six participants failed either the math EOG or the reading EOG.

About one third of the participants reported their retention year as merely a repeat of the first. According to school records, however, all participants did receive

extra academic support in the second year. Perhaps the extra help was more memorable for some than others.

Although attention problems are intrapersonal characteristics, they are discussed in this section because the attention problems appeared to lead to academic difficulties. Slightly more than a third of the participants described having difficulty paying attention in school. However, only one participant directly correlated his attention problem to being held back.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #2: "What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school?" Almost all of the participants described in detail their academic struggles. Reading seemed to improve over time more than math. Eight out of 12 participants improved their competence in reading, whereas three out of nine participants improved their competence in math. For most of those deficient in math, what started out as a barrier proved to be a weakness in later years. Yet, each participant was able to pass enough core academic classes to earn a college prep diploma.

Academic difficulty. Every participant described having one or more difficulties in school. Almost all of the difficulties were academic.

Struggled in school. Seventeen quotes were made by 13 different participants about struggling in school. Eleven of the participants talked specifically about their struggles in elementary school. One mentioned his challenge in high school, and the other said she just generally struggled in school. Emily gave a detailed description of her struggles, "I fought my parents a lot about doing

homework. I'd just sit there and I wouldn't get it. 'Cause I remember struggling with my parents. I remember sitting down with my parents for hours and hours trying to learn something and not getting it. I'd spend hours upon hours. I mean we'd go at it before dinner and after dinner until bed time." William compared himself to his peers, "I remember having more trouble than most of the kids in my class." Hilary remembered being identified with other struggling learners, "I'm pretty sure that they stuck me in a group with slower kids." Donna remembered struggling in several areas, "Like my math and like English and stuff like classes like those, I struggled more." Demetrius was held back in first grade, but he said he did not realize he was struggling in school until the third grade. I asked him what he remembered about that, "Not understanding the problems and stuff and getting Fs on my report card. Just not, yeah, just not studying." Mandy expressed frustration with school in general, "School's just hard in general for me 'cause it just is. Like pretty much math and science is about it, but the rest of it's OK. I like history a lot. They're the only things I like."

Some participants talked about struggling in school the year they were held back. Melissa framed her academic challenges in terms of a particular grade level, the grade in which she was retained, "I had a hard time in 5th grade." Like Melissa, Dawn identified an entire year as difficult, "So I just made no advancement. It was a wasted year." Jeff left public school to go to private school. After a few years, he returned to public school and discovered that he was struggling, "I mean, the classes were kinda hard for me. That's about it." Jacqueline's home life contributed to her

academic challenges, “Like my first grade year was sleeping most of the time. And so that’s why I didn’t function well.”

Reading difficulty. Reading problems plagued 12 participants. Those participants were quoted 22 times. Of these participants, six blamed their reading problems for holding them back. Michael was one of them. He said, “It was because we had these words that we could read, and the person who got the farthest on this piece of paper that read the words, um like I wasn’t reading up to date.” Heather announced early in the interview that reading was the reason she was retained, “I had to stay back and it was ‘cause I wasn’t good at reading. I was like reading first grade level and I didn’t pass one of the EOGs. Everybody in our family has like some kind of reading problem.” In addition, Mandy had a similar problem in third grade, “I’m pretty sure they said my reading level was low. So they held me back.” According to Anthony, he was retained in fourth grade because he was reading below grade level at the time. He said, “I had a lot of trouble reading in school. And it’s always been my biggest struggle. Since I read so slow, after I would read the whole chapter, I wouldn’t remember anything about it.” Kelly was retained in third grade, and she did not pass the Reading End of Grade (EOG) test. I asked her how she knew she had a problem in reading, and she said, “I did not feel comfortable reading at all out loud.” I asked her if her reading has improved, and she replied, “It’s gotten better. I can read it and tell you about it. I just can’t read it and write it down. It’s still complicated.” Morgan blamed her reading difficulties for holding her back in first grade, “I think I was held back because of my reading

skills and just comprehension of letters and all of that, I guess. I think I might have had some dyslexia, I'm not really sure."

Some participants were retained for reasons other than reading; however, reading did pose a problem for them. Although Emily said she was held back because she did not pass the EOG in math, she said reading was also a problem at the time. I asked her to talk about areas where she struggled, and she said, "Maybe reading a little bit because I never like to read. I actually love to read now." I asked Jacqueline the same question, and she replied, "That would be reading. I hated reading." Like Emily, Jacqueline claimed to like reading now, "Like books we have to, we have to read is not, I don't function good. 'Cause it's something that you're making me do. Like I can't do it on my own. Or like, when it's a lot of noise, I can't concentrate so. Um, it would be hard for me to read when there's people talking and stuff. And that's another reason why I hated reading. But now, if you put, if I get a good book, I could just sit there and read all day. But if it's a book that I have to read then, I just can't, I can't get into it like I want to."

Although Emily and Jacqueline may have turned around their reading issues, other participants claimed to carry the burden to this day. Hilary referenced reading as a lifelong problem and blamed her hearing loss for creating her reading problem, "I'm not a good reader. And I'm pretty sure it was because of my hearing loss in 2nd grade because it has been there for a while." I asked her how she knew she was not a good reader, and she said, "Because I was slower than all the other kids. And they would read really fast and I would be scared to be called on to read because I was so slow, and I didn't want people to make fun of me." William stated reading was and

still is a problem for him, “I guess reading was more difficult for me. I just never been a good reader. I remember having more trouble than most of the kids in my class. I still struggle with my reading.” Like William, Donna referenced not being a good reader at any time in her life, “Reading was the worst part for me. I hate reading. I still have a little trouble with reading.” Joyce said she was identified Academically/Intellectually Gifted (AIG) in school, but reading was not as strong as the other content areas. She said, “And we would take little reading selections, and I wanted to be the top at everything. I wanted to get the 100s, you know. For some reason, I struggled with that. I don’t read books on my own. When I took the SAT, reading was my lowest score.”

Math difficulty. Math was referenced 22 times for being challenging.

Eleven participants mentioned math as their nemesis. Aliah and Victor claimed their math challenges occurred in high school. The other nine participants indicated math was a problem earlier.

Three participants struggled early in math, but overcame their difficulties. Caroline talked about her challenges with math, “I think there were so many concepts to it. Different things you had to put together. That and problem solving. Always got in the way. Definitely, it was a challenge for me. ‘Cause everything else, I was like, it was so easy to me. It just came naturally. But the math, it was just, I would just sit at home for like an hour, two hours, just doing math. And one night, I just broke down in tears. I was like, it was just so hard. I couldn’t get it.” Caroline said she improved in math, “And then, of course, this year, it came all together and I understood it all. ...I had an awesome math teacher. I did really,

really well. And so, I was able to, I took a placement test and I placed out of my math classes.” Melissa said she had difficulty in math, “I struggled a lot with math and science. Almost everything but reading. I wasn’t failing, but I struggled really hard.” Melissa said she improved in math after getting help. I asked about the turning point for her in math; she answered, “I think my 6th grade teacher. I struggled a little bit in math still, but she always helped. And I went to after school tutoring with her a lot. I’m really good in math now.” Al mentioned that math was a problem for him early, “I struggled in math. Um, not all the way through. I think it was about, about 4th grade where I started to get the hang of it.” I asked him what helped, and he replied, “Uh. Really my focus span. Yeah. I just, you know, once you start paying attention to something you don’t really know nothing about then, you know, eventually it just starts coming to you and you learn more about it.”

Two participants seemed to have gaps in their mathematical skills. Myron talked about his struggles with math, “I don’t know, it just got harder as time goes on. So before I was struggling, it was 10 times easier when I was a human calculator. Yes, when I was like really young. I could do things other kids couldn’t do at the time with math. Yeah, over time it’s gotten worse and worse over math. Last year I had to go to summer school in math. But I completely excelled at it. But the only reason I was bad at math last year was it was geometry and fractions, two biggest things in math. The guy at summer school didn’t even believe in geometry or that so I completely excelled over everybody else in geometry in summer school.” Jeff explained his problem with math, “I was good at the math part. Well like when

they started incorporating like letters and stuff, I was just gone. Like I didn't even know what they were talking about.”

While reading was their biggest challenge, two participants talked about math being difficult for them, too. Heather explained that math became more challenging in middle school, “Cause like the math got harder. Like a lot harder. It was the math that came into play. It was about the highest grade I got was a D in math.” Mandy didn't mince words when explaining her difficulty in math, “I was just bad at it.”

The remaining two participants experienced no academic challenges other than math. Dawn, a self-proclaimed artist, described her difficulty with math, “Math has just never been my subject. Even now. I mean, if there's no creativity I can put into it, it's hard to get me to focus.” Emily's only problem seemed to be in math, “I did good in all my other classes except for math usually.”

Some participants improved in their areas of difficulty while others continued to struggle in school. One participant, a kindergarten retainee, reported worsening performance in an academic area. The table located in Appendix F shows the areas of academic difficulty and how each participant describes the current level of competence in that area.

Teachers. For a few participants, some teachers were perceived as barriers to a positive educational experience.

Disliked teacher who retained me. Three participants expressed dislike for the teacher who held them back. Caroline talked about a personal issue with her teacher that bothered her. However, she seemed to have resolved the problem, “I

mean, she wasn't my favorite teacher, but she did apologize for some of the things she may have said towards me." Kelly had to repeat third grade and had this to say about her teacher, "She was more fast paced. She didn't take her time to teach nothing'. She moved real fast." Dawn said that she didn't get the needed help from her teacher, "My first kindergarten teacher was not very proactive. And preventing bullying or getting me help with my medical problem."

Disliked other teacher. While those three participants expressed problems with the teacher who held them back, two participants said they did not like the teacher they had for the second time in their retained grade. I asked Mandy why she didn't like her second teacher for third grade; she said, "Well, she was kind of mean. She was just hateful in general." Emily perceived her second teacher in third grade as not being fond of teaching. She said, "The teacher was actually a science teacher. I feel like if she was teaching actually science, she would have probably liked teaching a little bit more. I feel like she wasn't very fond of it."

Seven participants mentioned not liking other teachers. A typical student may average 60 different teachers during their school careers. The chances of not liking one or two teachers may be quite possible. The likelihood of not liking them enough to mention it in an interview should be noteworthy. Morgan richly illustrated her dislike for a teacher, "I just didn't like my teacher at that school. That was, I hated her. She would slam the door and call us stupid little kids and, yes, she, I didn't like her." Dawn seemed to enjoy having personal relationships with her teachers; however, there was one who stood out to her for the opposite reason, "Like in fourth grade, my teacher was really mean. And she didn't really know me that

well. We never really talked. We, I kind a sat in her class and then I left.” Donna met me for the interview during one of her classes, and was glad of it. She said, “You know how you have teachers that are like mean? I have one during this 4th period, and I’m so glad you got me out of it. Like, oh God, she’s just horrible. She’s subbing for the whole semester. And she’s our chorus teacher, and she yells at us all the time. And she’s like, ‘You guys are the worst class ever.’”

Two participants talked about not liking an entire school of teachers. Although Aliah did not remember being held back, she remembered not liking the school, nor the teachers when she was in first grade, “Like, I didn’t like the students there or the teachers. Like, they were really rude.” Joyce remembered having a tough time in middle school and said this about her middle school teachers, “But personally, I did not like the teachers there.”

Physical education teachers were mentioned as not being well liked by two participants. I asked Michael if he had any challenges in school, and he talked about his coaches. Michael thought well of his athleticism, and he said this about one of his basketball coaches, “And the coach wasn’t giving me enough playing time and that was making me not want to play anymore.” Emily remembered being scolded by her elementary school physical education teacher for crying. She said, “Um, I remember in PE, if I did something wrong, it would always bother me. And I would cry about it. And I did that all through elementary school. The kids would get on to me about messing up or something, and it would bother me ‘cause I would mess up. The PE teacher would get on to me for crying. Um, I hated being yelled at.”

Teacher did not like me. Two participants talked about their teachers not liking them. Caroline said she did not like the teacher who retained her, but the sentiment appeared mutual, at least to Caroline. She said, “I think she may have been a little bit jealous of me because like, the assistant teacher, like she just loved me. And, I think that if she’d gotten to know me a little bit more and just seeing how sweet I was, it would have been a little bit easier.” Emily talked about her second teacher in third grade, “The second one, well she kind of yelled a little bit. But she wasn’t fond of me. I feel like she wasn’t really fond of me. But I don’t how much she liked me. I was really talkative.”

Same thing, second time around. Seven participants talked about how they perceived their second year in the retained grade as not any different than the first year. I asked Michael if anything was different about his second time in first grade, and he said his second time around was a repeat of the first with one exception, “Except just the friend part. That was the only different thing.” Caroline talked about her second time in first grade, “I had to adapt to a new teacher, and I had to learn things over again, of course. I knew all of ‘em, but just having to learn them again. But sometimes you get a clearer picture the second time around.” William, who was held back because of his excessive absences, talked about his second time in kindergarten, “I was kinda bored ‘cause you know some of the stuff they taught, I already knew.”

Four other participants recalled their retention year being a repeat of their first year. They were not very descriptive, but made comments like Ben’s when I asked about the difference between the two years, “Not so much. It was basically the

same thing.” At a different time in the interview, Ben described receiving extra help, “I had to take this class. I think it was around first grade. I don’t remember what it was for. But the teachers in that class helped me a lot. It was, they took me, me and a couple other kids, they just, it was basically they just helped me when I was having trouble.” Hilary reported receiving extra help outside of school, “...I went to Sylvan.” School records indicated that all participants received extra help the year after they were retained.

Attention difficulty. Six different participants talked about their difficulty with paying attention to their school work. I asked Jacqueline how she knew she struggled in reading; she said, “Because it would take me a long time to get the, um, it would take me a long time to get the work down. And like people could talk and work at the same time, but I have to have just like silence. Like it can’t be no kind of talking.” Like Jacqueline, Ben found it difficult to work around others, “So they had to take me out of an environment where there was so many kids. ‘Cause I wouldn’t pay attention when there was a lot of kids around.” Anthony, too, said he was easily distracted, “When I was in elementary school, I had a really hard time paying attention. I was always distracted by something. It could be the littlest thing. And I would always be off task.”

Some participants struggled in school because they had difficulty focusing. Demetrius described his struggles, “Always dazing outside and not paying attention.” Al said his learning improved when he started focusing more, “...once you start paying attention to something you don’t really know nothing about then, you know, eventually it just starts coming to you and you learn more about it.”

Morgan had difficulty remembering when she was diagnosed with Attention Deficit, Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), but she recalled having difficulty focusing, “I couldn’t sit there and read, do your 20 minutes of reading.”

Policy issues. Educational policies proved to be barriers for some participants. At the time these participants were retained, North Carolina General Statutes for education stated that students must pass the reading and math EOG in third and fifth grades in order to be considered for promotion. Local Education Authority policies for these participants stated that they had to attend school for a certain number of days in order to be considered for promotion. Of the 22 participants, seven were held back in third, fourth, or fifth grade, the EOG testing grades. However, only five of the seven did not pass the EOG in the area in which they struggled. Melissa and Jeff both claimed to struggle in math when they were retained in fifth grade, however, they both passed the EOG in math. One participant, William, said he was held back because of his attendance.

Early Memories

It was like when I came home, I was like, “Mom, did you know they put me back in third grade?”

-Kelly

This section represents 75 coded responses, divided into two parts: Initial Reactions and Second time in the Retained Grade. Themes and subclusters are indicated in Tables 6 and 7. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The components of this section and the themes that emerged are

illustrated in Figure 9. Interpretation of the evidence includes a summation of the themes and answers to research questions. Evidence of themes and subclusters is presented by documented examples of direct quotes from the participants.

Table 6

Themes for Early Memories, Initial Reactions

Themes	Subclusters	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants Involved in the Responses
Upset at the News		47	16
	Friends Would Move on Without Me	23	10
	Didn't Want to be Held Back	17	10
	Self-deprecating Thoughts	3	3
	Worried About Humiliation	4	2
	Limited Recollection		6
At Ease With the News		5	4

Table 7

Themes for Early Memories, Second Time in Retained Grade

Themes	<i>Number of Coded Responses</i>	<i>Number of Participants in the Responses</i>
Embarrassed	9	6
Easier Work	4	4
Felt Accepted	4	3

Figure 9. Themes and Subclusters for Early Memories

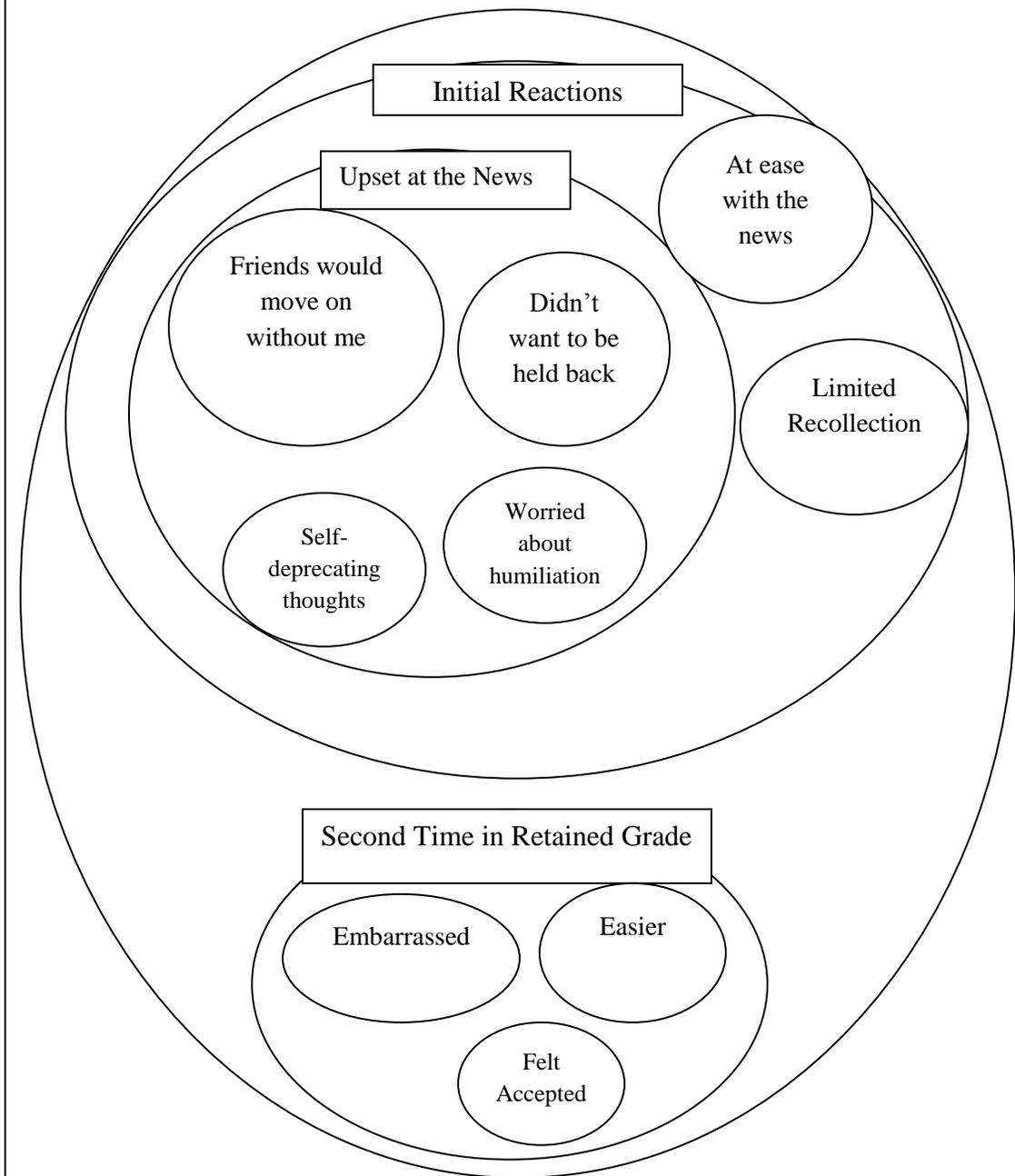


Figure 9. Strengths of themes and subclusters are shown by relative size of each circle. Strengths are based on the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response.

Interpretation of Early Memories, Initial Reactions

The dominant theme in this section was Upset at the News. Sixteen participants remembered having a negative reaction to the news of their retention. Of those participants, ten seemed to be more concerned with losing their friends. Sadness and anger permeated the responses from the participants who remembered their initial reactions. Knowing their friends would move on without them was the source of most of the sadness. Participants who were retained in later grades, such as fourth or fifth grade, expressed more anger than sadness at not moving up with their friends.

Seven of those 10 and three other participants talked about being upset at not being promoted. Not being promoted appeared to cause three participants to harbor self-deprecating thoughts. Because they were not promoted, they felt they were not as smart as their peers. An additional two participants worried about being humiliated. However, only one participant told a story of being teased for not being promoted.

Four participants remembered tolerating the news well. Most of them seemed to be relieved because their first year was difficult. Either they made no friends during their first year or they struggled academically.

Six participants did not remember much about their retention event. Each of them indicated that they were either indifferent to the event or did not know about it until years later. Kindergarten retentions seemed to have the least impact on memory. Those who remember being retained in kindergarten experienced less negative emotions than those who were held back in first grade and beyond.

It appeared that the younger retainees were sad at the news, if they had any negative emotions. The older retainees reported being more angry than sad. The table located in Appendix G illustrates the continuum of emotions regarding initial reactions from participants' direct quotes.

Interpretation of Early Memories, Second Time in Retained Grade

Not much was mentioned regarding feelings and emotions as the participants entered their second year in the retained grade. This might be because the bulk of the emotions had been experienced and expressed when the participants first learned about being held back. By the time the new school year started, perhaps the participants had resigned themselves to repeating the grade.

A few participants mentioned starting the school year with some embarrassment. Surprisingly, only one participant gave a graphic account of being teased during her second year because she was held back. Teasing occurred with other participants, but they described the events as happening years later.

Some said the school year was easier than the first time around. Either they were more familiar with the content or they received extra help. A few participants talked about feeling accepted by their peers.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #1: How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school? A wide range of emotions at the news of their retention was reported by the participants.

Participants who were held back in early grades reported having less memory or less

negative emotions than those participants who were held back in later grades. More than half of the participants recalled being upset at the news of being held back.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #2: "What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school?" About two thirds of the participants in this sample were retained in the primary grades. For those who could remember, having difficulty in one or more academic area was a significant part of their history. Although all the participants claimed to improve academically, many continued to struggle in the early years after they were retained.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #4: What characteristics of resiliency, if any, did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success? The participants who recalled being upset at the news of their retention generally seemed to move past the negative emotions once the new school year started. Brooks and Goldstein (2001) stated that resiliency allows a child "to bounce back from disappointments and adversity (p. 1). For the most part, the participants started the next school year with no mention of internalizing or externalizing negative emotions.

Initial reaction. Most of the participants remembered their reactions when they first learned they would be held back. On the whole, they did not hesitate to recall those memories during the interview.

Upset at the news. Sixteen of the participants described negative reactions upon hearing they would be held back. Ten of the 16 participants seemed to be concerned that their friends were leaving them. Joyce was one of five participants

who was retained in kindergarten, however, she was the only participant held back at this young age who had such a concern. “I remember being upset that my best friend was going on to the first grade and I wasn’t. That’s the only real thing that I was concerned about. I think it helped that she came and saw me every day. But it really wasn’t a big deal. I was able to make friends easily.”

Friends would move on without me. Seven participants were held back in first grade. Three of them expressed an initial concern about losing their friends. Michael, who didn’t want to be “friendless,” talked about his initial reaction, “I kinda felt like I was losing friends. That the friends that I had, um, in my first grade year, they were going to graduate before me. And I was friends with them.” Ben remembered being confused by the news, “But I mean, I was just confused. I was like well, why don’t I get to move on and be with all my friends?” Caroline said she was sad to leave her best friend, “And one of my best friends, I didn’t get to go on and, with my school career. And hang out with her and get to know her even more.”

One second grade retaineer remembered being upset about losing her friends. Donna did not like the awkward position she would be in with her friends, “Like my friends all went on and then I wouldn’t be able to go on, and so it would be awkward to be held back. I think I was upset about it. ‘Cause my friends all got to go on. But I think I was just too upset about it and I didn’t want to do it.” According to Donna, her parents moved her to a different school to save her from humiliation. “I wouldn’t have to be like, ‘cause you know when you get held back, and then your friends go on and they see that you’re still in second grade, they’re like ‘that girl was with me in my class last year.’”

Seven participants were retained in the intermediate grades, four in third grade, one in fourth, and two in fifth. Of those seven participants, five of them talked about losing friends. Kelly didn't know she was retained until she started school the next year. "It was like when I came home, I was like, 'Mom, did you know they put me back in third grade?' And she's like, 'yeah, I held you back.'" Kelly said this about her initial reaction, "I asked her why. 'Cause I figured I lost all my friends. I didn't believe I could make more." Heather was retained in third grade and said this when she realized she was being held back, "It was kinda hard because all my friends were moving on and I had to stay back. And I started crying, I remember crying." Emily described a near breakdown when she realized she was not going to be promoted to the fourth grade. "I didn't realize that I was actually going to be held back. ...But that I wanted to be with my friends."

Anthony was the only participant held back in fourth grade, but like the third grade retainees, he did not want his friend to move on without him. "I felt really bad because I did not want to get held back. I wanted to stay in the same grade as one of my best friends. When I was in school. I was really sad. And I cried because I did not want to get held back." Jeff was held back in fifth grade and he described his anger at the news, "And I got mad and went to my room and was, you know, kinda shell shocked because I wasn't going to be with my friends anymore. And I got mad and I ended up punching my window."

Didn't want to be held back. Ten participants talked about not wanting to be held back when they initially learned of the news. In addition to losing their friends, some participants were upset about not being promoted. Caroline said, "I was kind

of shocked about it. And I didn't quite understand it. I was young, I was little. So, I didn't really get it." In an apparent intervention to assist in the transition, Caroline said her principal allowed to "pick" her next teacher. "He introduced me to the other teachers that were going to teach first grade, and I talked to them. And Miss Jorissen, of course, she was the one that just, I kind of, I like her. And it was just someone I could relate to." Heather recalled the initial conversation with her mother, "She was just like, 'you're not going to be able to go on.' And I started crying, I remember crying." Like Caroline, Emily remembered a tearful conversation, "I didn't think that they could do that. I was so young. I didn't think they could actually do that. My mom was like, 'You have to repeat third grade.' And I remember asking why and crying. I remember crying a lot, just breaking out in tears. Uh, fighting with them about it, just saying that I could do it." Donna remembered a conversation with her mother, too, "But I think I was just too upset about it and I didn't want to do it. My mom was like, 'You have to.'" Anthony talked about his conversation with his mother, "Well when my mom first told me that I was getting held back, I felt really bad because I did not want to get held back."

While they did not mention losing their friends, three participants said they did not want to be held back. Mandy, who was held back in third grade, expressed some ambivalence, "I don't think I really cared then. Then, like after it happened, I cared. I didn't want to." Mandy's twin brother was promoted, and this seemed to have bothered her. "I have a twin brother and didn't not want to be in his grade level. I didn't want him to graduate before me or anything. I wanted to stay with him."

Even though she later realized the benefit of her retention, Morgan said she harbored resentment about being retained for several years, "...4th grade, 5th grade, up until probably 7th grade, I wished they'd never held me back. I don't know why. I just I did not want to be held back." Melissa seemed to be the only participant who was aware of the possibility of retention well in advance. She reported finding out when she received her second report card in January. "I just remember sitting down with my mom and stepdad and them telling me that they think it would be best for me. I wasn't failing, but they think it'd be best if I stayed back in 5th grade, because I wasn't ready to go to 6th grade yet and handle all of the pressures of switching classes and having other classes and exploratories and not having one teacher. Instead, having 4 teachers, and I wouldn't be able to keep up with bringing certain things to class and just all of it together. Just, middle school. I think I was upset. I can't remember too much, but I think I was upset."

Self-deprecating thoughts. Three participants harbored self-deprecating thoughts after they learned they would be held back. Kelly said, "I felt like I couldn't make it through school anymore." When I asked her why, she responded, "I felt like I wasn't smart enough to make it. 'Cause everybody else was moving on ahead." Anthony shared a similar reaction, "I didn't really feel that great about myself because I didn't pass. I felt like I wasn't all that smart." Although Dawn was retained in kindergarten, she remembered feeling bad about herself, "Um I kinda blamed myself, well like, "I did something wrong." I failed."

Worried about being humiliated. Two participants remembered worrying about being humiliated. Emily shared her worries, "My first thought was what are

my friends going to think? I mean they're going to be 4th graders and I'm going to be a 3rd grader again. Are they going to make fun of me?" Morgan told the story of how her fears came true, "Yes, this kid in I remember on the bus in, this kid would have been in second grade, 'cause he was in my first first grade class. He was like, 'Why aren't you in second grade?' And he just sat there and teased me and teased me about how I was in first grade twice and I got to stay with the same teacher. I went home several times crying. Because he would sit there and make fun of me on the bus."

Limited recollection. Six participants expressed having little memory of the early events in their elementary school life as they related to being held back. I asked Victor if he remembered being held back, "To be honest, no. I mean I knew I was." I asked him how he knew, and he said, "Well, same room, different people." Hilary described her lack of understanding at the time she was held back in second grade, "Like I don't even, I don't even think they told me they had me stay back. I just remember having the same teacher for two years in a row. I just walked into the same class and it didn't really bother me." Hilary's first year in second grade was a combination class with first and second graders. She explained, "I just remember being in class again with the same kids. The people that were in there for first grade, they ended up being in my grade now on." Myron said that he may have realized he was retained in kindergarten when he was in first grade. He said, "Maybe first grade? I think I realized. I don't know...it was weird like I was a year older. That's when I definitely realized." I asked him if he specifically remembered anything when he realized he had been held back, and he answered, "Not really. Didn't think

much of it at the time.” I pressed to determine if his mother told him that he was held back, and he replied, “She probably did, but I forgot.” Two participants discovered they were retained several years later. Aliah talked about a conversation with her mother, “We was at home. I was in middle school when she told me. She was like, well, I held you back anyway. I was like, What? I was like, Oh, I got held back? She was like, Yeah. I was like, Oh, well. OK. But I like I wasn’t upset about it. I just looked at her and was like, “Oh!” I was in shock, but later I just didn’t care.”

Like Aliah, Jacqueline did not know she was held back until years later. “I didn’t realize it until, um freshmen year, no, yeah freshman year. ‘Cause like people were saying their ages and like I would be the oldest one. And then my age would be the grade higher. So I kinda put two and two together. And plus, I was at a visit, well no, I was visiting her up the street. My mom told me that I was held back in first grade. She actually told me before ninth grade year. I was probably third, fourth grade. She told me that I was held back. And I didn’t really grasp what “held back” was or um, really think about being held back. And then, as the years progressed, then I noticed that I’m the oldest out of my friends’ group. So. And then, I would have friends from the upper class, and I would fit more in with the upper class than my friends that’s in my actual grade that I was in. And so that’s when I realized that she was right, that I was held back.” Demetrius said that he did not remember being told that he and his twin brother would be held back in first grade. “I just remember going to the classes in school. I don’t remember sitting

down and talking to my mom or dad about being held back. I don't remember really being in first grade."

At ease with the news. Four participants didn't seem to mind being held back. According to William, his attendance problems in kindergarten precluded his social development. This was his stated reaction to the news that he would be held back in kindergarten, "I wasn't too upset because I didn't really have that many friends in kindergarten so... Thought it was another chance to meet some kids." William seemed glad that he was held back, "I actually preferred it. Try to make some new friends." According to Dawn, her first year in school was unproductive. She said this about her reaction to the news, "My parents came in and they sat down and talked, and they asked me about how I felt about it. And I didn't really, I kinda realized it had been a wasted year. I kinda realized I hadn't done anything the whole year. I had no friends at all. I was kinda like, OK. I wasn't really that upset." Morgan's parents told her during the summer that she was being held back in first grade. "I think it was because I was talking about, 'Oh, who am I going to get next year? Who's going to be my teacher?'" And they kind of sat me down and told me, 'You're going to be in first grade again, and you're going to have the same teacher.' And I was like, 'Oh, OK.' But then, what really helped me was the same teacher. 'Cause I would have her again. And they were like, 'You'll be fine.' I was like, 'OK, I'll have the same teacher, I'll be better.'"

Emily reported being very upset at first, then relieved. She said, "But my mom had said that later that night, I had, when she had come to tuck me into bed, I

had just said that it was a wave of relief when I actually had sat down and had time to think about it.”

I asked each participant to tell me why he or she was retained. Most of the explanations were consistent with school records. Some participants were aware of the reason for being held back at the time the event occurred. Others recalled what they were told by their parents, or they simply did not know. The table located in Appendix H displays participants’ explanations for their retentions.

Second time in the retained grade. Most of the participants recalled entering the retained grade for the second time, although they may not have remembered the first day. These responses seemed to reflect less clear memories than the initial reactions.

Embarrassed. Six participants talked about being embarrassed. Emily talked about being embarrassed at failure. She said, “I was kind of embarrassed by it because I think the first thing people think is, ‘Oh she failed.’” Mandy reported not having much affect at the time she was retained. However, she mentioned being embarrassed, “Like the next time I was in third grade. Like I know I was embarrassed, I remember that. Well, I just walked in there and didn’t really know anybody.” Donna’s parents helped her avoid facing her embarrassment by changing her school, “I had to change, I think, yeah, I changed schools because, I guess like humiliation. Like my friends all went on and then I wouldn’t be able to go on and so it would be awkward to be held back.” Although Ben felt accepted once he became a part of the class, his initial feeling was one of embarrassment, “Uhh, it was awkward. It was a little bit awkward. Cause I mean, I was like, I felt just older than

everybody. I was like, OK well, I'm older than these kids." Morgan talked about her discomfort at being older than the other students, "I guess, I felt embarrassed. I'm just the oldest kid in the class."

At first, Al could not remember the events surrounding his retention; he wasn't sure in which grade he was retained. "I can't really make up a story of how it was told. It's been so long." Al did recall playing in his family's back yard when his mother received the news. "That day when I got home, they always send out report cards...if you pass or not. Well like, couple weeks went in to summer and you know we were outside playing. I remember this like it was yesterday, and we were outside playing on the trampoline and my mom called me up to the porch. And you know, my mom's sitting there and I guess she was shocked at that I wasn't going to be going on. So I was sitting outside and said, 'What's wrong?' She was like, 'you didn't pass.' And I was just like, 'So I gotta take this class over? I mean, that's (just) great.'" And she's like, 'Yeah.' As the interview unfolded, Al seemed to recall his feelings about being held back, "Oh I was upset. Honestly. Because knowing that you know, I wasn't going to be able to keep going forward, and you know, just having to uh, see all the kids that were you know, in that grade with me next year. Just the fact that them seeing me in a lower grade again. And you know, it was kind of embarrassing but, I don't know. It was just, it was hard. I was more embarrassed than sad."

Easier work. Four participants reported their retained year being easier. That was William's one-word response when I asked him about his second time in kindergarten, "Easier." Myron was more emphatic, "It was 10 times more easier."

Don't know. Maybe because I'd already been through it." I asked Heather if her second time in third grade was any different, and she said, "Um.. not at the beginning. As it got closer to the end of the year, it got kinda easier." Melissa had a similar response, "I guess, since I'd already been there, done it, it was a lot easier."

Felt accepted. Three participants reported feeling accepted by their peers in their new classroom as they entered for the first time. Emily said, "I felt very welcomed when I started my first day of third grade again." Donna reported receiving a lot of help when she entered second grade for the second time, "I was welcomed into like a new family and everyone was super nice. If I needed help with reading, my friends all helped me. If I needed help with homework, my friends helped me." Ben said that he was hesitant at first, but his class quickly made him feel at ease, "I mean, well, just the whole setting just was good. I mean I felt awkward at first, but the kids just accepted me and the teachers accepted me and so it wasn't hard to fit right in."

Current Impressions of the Impact of Retention

"...it gives you an idea of a positive outcome and not necessarily a bad one.

And how it can change someone completely." -Caroline

This section represents a small number of coded responses, which total 96. Themes and subclusters are indicated in Table 8. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The components of this section and the themes that emerged are illustrated in Figure 10. Interpretation of the evidence includes a summation of the themes and answers to research questions. Evidence is

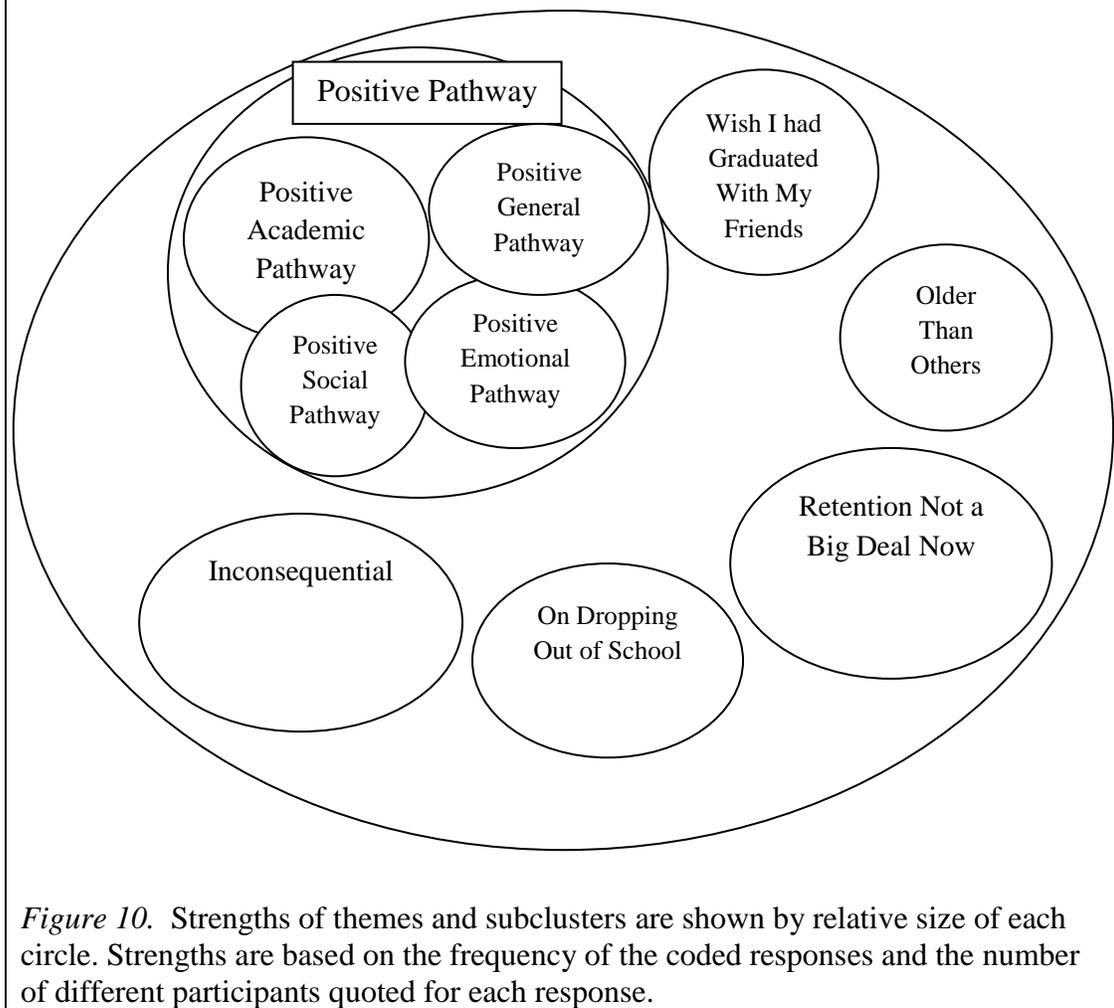
presented by documented examples of direct quotes from the participants that illustrate themes and subclusters.

Table 8

Current Impressions of the Impact of Retention

Theme	Subcluster	Number of Coded Responses	Number of Participants in the Responses
Positive pathway		35	13
	Positive general pathway	3	3
	Positive academic pathway	22	9
	Positive social pathway	8	5
	Positive emotional pathway	2	2
Inconsequential		16	9
Retention not a big deal now		18	8
Wish I had graduated with my friends		10	6
Older than others		7	7
On dropping out of school		7	6
		10	7

Figure 10. Current Impressions of the Impact of Retention



Interpretation of Current Impressions of the Impact of Retention

Participants discussed their thoughts and impressions in terms of how retention affected them academically, emotionally, and in relation to others over time. Most of the participants held strong opinions about the personal impact of being held back. The interview process seemed to help some participants clarify and come to terms with their retention as they reflected on their experiences. This was evident in the apparent conflicting statements made by some participants. Most of the participants placed themselves in the middle of retention research while a few set

aside their experiences to expound upon the virtues or detriments of being held back. Some participants talked about how being held back in elementary school set them on a different trajectory through school with a good friend or better set of friends. Some participants reported being glad to be a part of their high school graduating class. Others expressed resentment at not graduating with their friends.

The dominant theme in this section was Positive Pathway. More than half of the participants claimed their retention experience put them on a more positive pathway than if they had not been held back. For those making this claim, academic improvement was most often cited as the largest benefit. Finding a best friend, more friends, or a better set of friends was a benefit of retention, as well. In addition, having an extra year to work through personal issues was cited by a few participants.

Slightly less than half of the participants claimed no benefits or consequences for being held back. Either they did not remember being retained or they felt being retained had no impact on them. When asked to discuss retention in general terms, however, several of those participants claimed that retention could be beneficial. A few of them changed their opinion in the other direction saying that, in general, students should not be held back.

Slightly more than one third of the participants claimed that being held back was no longer a big deal to them. Half of those claims came from participants who extolled the benefits of their retention. The other half came from participants who said retention made no difference.

Several participants expressed regret at not graduating with their friends. Two participants' regret was expressed strongly. I perceived them to harbor some

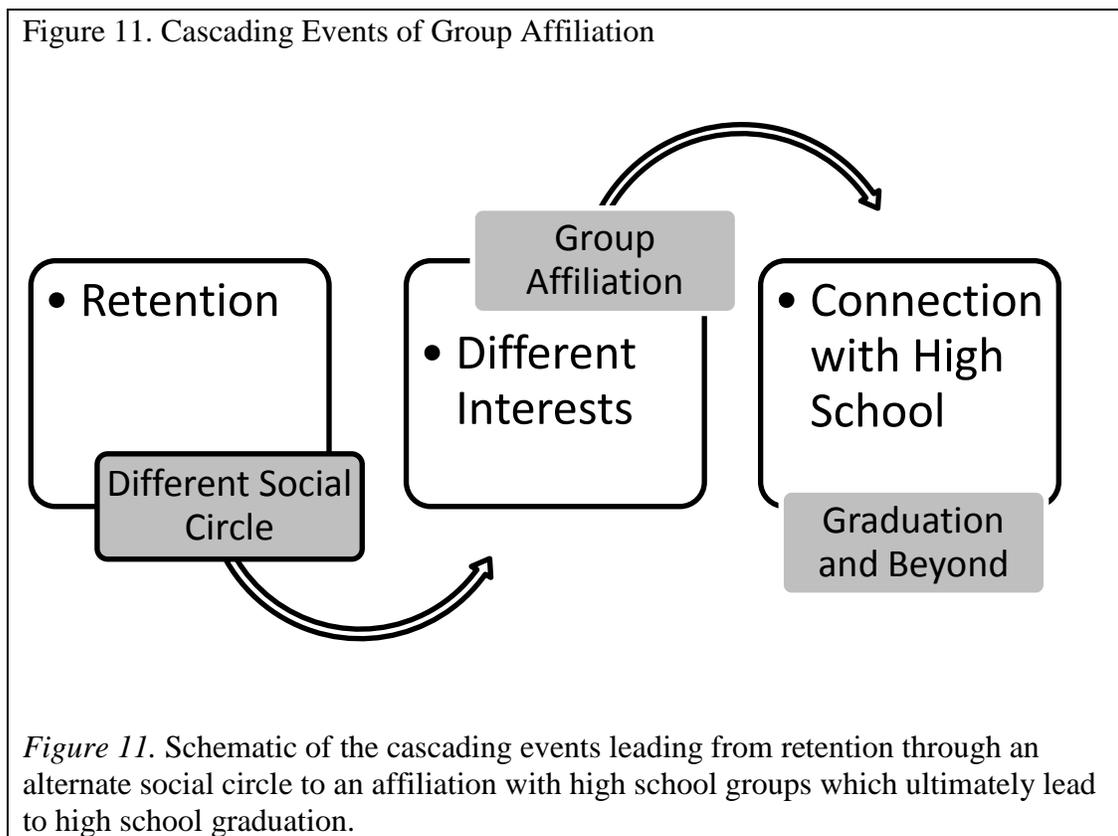
resentment. It was interesting to note that the regret was aimed at not graduating with friends instead of not graduating on time, or prolonging the time in school. Indeed, several participants mentioned being older than others. Most of the comments were not pejorative, however.

While not part of the interview protocol, several participants talked about the option of dropping out of school. In fact, two participants considered dropping out, and two other participants struggled against significant home life barriers to stay in school.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #1: "How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school?" While most of the participants clearly articulated their feelings, no one theme dominated throughout the sample. About half of the participants said retention helped; about half claimed retention had no impact. The effect of being held back in elementary school appeared to hold individualized meaning to each participant.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #3: "What are the high school seniors' perceptions of how transactions between those environments over time shaped them into the people they are now?" Being held back changed them. Retention gave some a chance to improve reading or math skills. Retention gave others a new and, sometimes, a better social circle. For a few, the negative impact came during their junior year when they saw their original social circle graduate from school without them.

The transactions between the participants' social and educational environments seemed to shape them in significant ways. The transactions between the participants' social environments appeared to create positive pathways for them throughout school. Many participants claimed to have a social network that was different from their social environments before they were held back. The new circle of friends created new interests which opened up other opportunities that lead to affiliation with certain educational groups such as theater or clubs. This transactional process is illustrated in Figure 11.



Positive pathway. Most of the participants described how retention changed their pathways in a positive way. They talked about being given the opportunity to meet new people or to improve their academic skills.

General. Three participants talked about how being held back changed them. Donna mentioned how retention made a difference in her life, “I guess it made a difference in like who I am, the way that I act. Because like the teachers that I got to meet, and the people I got to become friends with.” Emily said retention created a very different pathway for her, “I feel like I would be completely different if I had stayed in that class, I feel like I would be a completely different person.” Caroline made a similar comment, “And it gives you an idea of a positive outcome and not necessarily a bad one. And how it can change someone completely.”

Academic. Twenty-two quotes from nine different participants illustrated how retention in elementary school improved academics for them. Emily was retained in third grade and struggled with math. She said, “I did a whole lot better. Math was a whole bunch easier.” Aliah talked about retention catching her up, “Cause if I would have kept moving on, I still wouldn’t know certain stuff. Because I actually caught up with the kids.” Jacqueline made similar comments, “Cause I mean if I didn’t get retained, then I mean I wouldn’t know some of the stuff for the next grade. And then I wouldn’t know some of that stuff for the next grade so. But now that I look back over it, I feel grateful for it because um, if they would just pass kids that was not needing to be passed, then I would be probably real slow. Because I didn’t really know the stuff that I really need to know to help me with the grades.” Caroline said retention helped her, “It’s made me stronger. It’s given me the ability to look at things differently and just grasp each concept and understand things. It did help me academically. I went from like, third grade, I had a C in math. I went from having a C to a B and just, I continued on. And it

definitely made a difference. I've had good grades, like all the way." Heather reflected, "Now looking at it, it helped me more." I asked her what she thought would have happened if she had not been held back, and she replied, "I think I'd still be reading like at a lower grade level." Ben said retention helped him, "I think it helped me a lot as a person, to grow and be smarter now. Because I learned a lot more, being held back." Melissa seemed to agree with her parents about not being ready for middle school when she was held back in fifth grade, "I don't think I would have been ready. I would have failed in 6th grade or 7th, maybe even high school. I think that getting held back was a good thing. It helped me out a lot. I wasn't academically ready and I wasn't mentally, I guess mature enough to handle being in middle school or high school." Anthony, who said being retained made him feel "not that smart," reflected on what might have happened if he was not held back, "Because, if I didn't, then I would have had more problems the older I'd get. At least I think I would have." Morgan credited retention for her achievement, "If I hadn't stayed back, then I wouldn't be in my honors classes. I think I would have been, that extra year, I really think helped me. I guess about 8th grade, freshman year when I started taking these honors classes, I'm like, 'I don't think I could have done this without the extra year of really doing the reading comprehension and with the extra teachers in first and kindergarten, I don't think I would be at the same level that I'm at.'"

Social. Eight codes illustrated five different participants' perceptions of how retention helped them socially. Emily said, "I made better friends. I actually like the class that I graduated with more so than the class I was in." Caroline seemed glad

about her retention, “I actually think that me being held back was actually a good thing.” I asked her why, and she responded, “...I met new friends along the way and I actually gained a best friend my year when I was held back. So, that it was really good for me. And we’re still friends today. And she’s practically like my sister ‘cause I’m an only child.” William, who was retained for attendance problems, said he had no friends during his first year. I asked him if being held back changed that, and he replied, “I made better friends. And stayed friends with them now until this day.” Friends seemed to be an important change for Ben, too, “And actually, when I look at it now, I’m glad I got held back. ‘Cause if I didn’t, I wouldn’t know the people I know now.” I asked Dawn how retention affected her, if at all, and she responded, “I really think it really helped me. It kinda showed me, you know, you need a good environment where you have friends. You have reliable people around you.”

Emotional. Two participants talked about how being held back helped them emotionally. Kelly, who reported suffering from her parents’ divorce when she was held back in third grade, said, “I think it helped because it gave me more time to get myself together.” Dawn claimed that being held back helped her through the bullying she endured, “I really think it really helped me. It kinda showed me, you know, you need a good environment where you have friends. You have reliable people around you.”

Inconsequential. Nine participants talked about their retention not having much effect. For example, Victor, who could not remember being retained, said this when I asked him about the impact of being held back, “I’m only speaking for

myself; it really hasn't affected me too much." I asked Al if being retained helped his math achievement, and he replied, "Um, no. I think I just got better in math because I started paying attention. I actually started caring." Also, Myron reported not experiencing any difference, "Thinking that it would make a difference because you were held back is, uh, ignorant. Made no difference to me whatsoever." I asked Mandy what might have happened if she had been promoted instead of retained in the third grade. She answered, "Well I think I would have been fine. That's just me. I don't really know. I was young. 'Cause they really didn't do anything, I don't think, second time around. Like I know I got help and stuff, but I could've gotten that in 4th grade." Demetrius said he did not see a difference, "I don't think there's a difference, being held back or just going to second grade." I asked Hilary if being held back made a difference in her graduating from high school. She responded, "Um, I don't think it's made a difference. It does make me feel old. Everyone's like 16 or 17 and I'm 18." At a different point in the interview, Hilary seemed somewhat conflicted about whether or not retention helped her or not, "I don't think it's made a difference. I don't think I've improved. Well, maybe a little bit, clearly."

Although they talked about how being held back helped them, as documented in the Positive Pathway section, three participants responded differently at another point during the interview. William's typical short response adequately captured his thoughts regarding the effect of being held back. He said, "No, not really" when I asked if being retained made a difference in his graduating from high school. I asked Aliah if there would have been a difference in her education if she had been promoted to second grade instead of being retained in first; she replied, "I don't feel

like it would. I don't know why, just don't." Early in the interview, Donna talked about her parents deciding whether or not it would help to hold her back in second grade. She added, "But, I think in reality, it didn't do much. I don't think it mattered."

Retention is not a big deal now. Eight participants talked about how being held back in elementary school is not such a big deal now that they are older. Michael said, "Then it was a big deal. Now it's, 'Oh yeah, I got held back in first grade.' I mean it's not that big of a deal to me anymore. Just because now, I'm graduated." Emily said she talks openly about her retention, "Like everybody knows it. It doesn't bother me at all." Aliah said that her mother brought up the subject once, and it embarrassed her. I asked her if she is still embarrassed, and she responded, "No. I'm used to it. Like I don't think it's an embarrassing subject." Mandy said she found herself explaining that her twin brother was in a grade ahead of her. I asked how that felt, and she said, "It doesn't really bother me. I don't really care." Victor expressed a similar sentiment, "To be honest, it hasn't really affected me." Similarly, Al said, "I don't really look at it as a setback on my life. You know, that was then, this is now. So, it doesn't really bother me." Heather paralleled Al, "Um Looking back on it now, I don't really, it don't bother me because I've made it this far being held back. It doesn't bother me." Ben captured the group sentiment by saying, "Well, I mean, it feels fine 'cause it's not that big of a deal anymore."

Wish I had graduated with my friends. Six participants mentioned being left behind to graduate a year later. Michael said, "I mean, the people I was hanging

out with, they were one year ahead of me. I would have graduated with them if I hadn't been held back." Caroline made a similar comment, "I didn't get to graduate with all those friends I made and, I graduated this year, a year later than everyone else in my first grade class." Donna echoed Michael and Caroline, "I wish that I would have graduated last year because like all my friends graduated and this year." Mandy said that her twin brother and all their friends graduated the year before her. She explained, "I wish I would have graduated last year. I really, I don't like, Now I'm still kinda like, I just really wish I would have graduated last year with everybody. 'Cause that, like last year was all my friends. Like I don't even know anybody hardly in this school 'cause they're a whole lot younger than me." Al illustrated his sentiment in terms of advice to his little sister, "But what I do, one thing I do is, I try to tell my little sister that's going through elementary now, you know, focus, you might end up like me and you might end up seeing the kids that you grew up with in elementary school graduate high school without you. And that leaves you to fall back and graduate with another class. That's what I tell her, like work hard. For real." Jeff's resentment was evident in his comment, "'Cause I still think that, like last year, I had a class with uh, my Carhart brother and a bunch of other friends from there. And I would have liked to walk the stage with them, but I'm still stuck here with everybody else."

Older than others. Six participants reflected on their age in comparison to others. Victor briefly mentioned the difference between him and his graduating classmates, "I was just a year older." Aliah and Jacqueline noticed their age difference from their classmates before they learned of their retention. Jacqueline

noticed how she related more to upper classmen, “I would have friends from the upper class, and I would fit more in with the upper class than my friends that’s in my actual grade that I was in.” Hilary made mention of her age, too, “It does make me feel old. Everyone’s like 16 or 17 and I’m 18.” Anthony seemed to be amused at the reactions he received when others discover his age, “But in high school, I’ll tell everybody that I’m 19 and they’re like, “Oh my gosh.” Or “You’re lying.” Or “there’s no way.” Can I see your driver’s license to see if you really are 19? I just get a lot of crazy reactions.” Joyce framed her comparison in terms of maturity rather than age as she explained the difference, “I see my vision and I’m ready to go after it. And these other kids are just getting so distracted. I just don’t have the same values as them.”

In the hope of encouraging participants to reveal their perspectives of being held back, I asked them to tell me what they generally thought about holding elementary students back. I worried that some participants may be reticent about exposing their feelings and emotions; therefore, I approached the subject with more superficiality. I gained more insight into some participants’ perceptions through this approach. However, some participants’ comments surprised me as they seemed inconsistent with their personal stories.

For example, the participants’ comments about retention in general were less neutral than their personal stories. Eight participants couched their personal retention in more or less neutral terms contrasted to three participants describing retention in general in neutral terms. Fourteen participants recommended retention in contrast to twelve participants describing positively their personal retention

events. Five participants did not favor retention in general contrasted to two participants describing their personal retention events in negative terms. Discussing retention in general seemed to draw out more personal feelings, which resulted in more polarized opinions.

Three participants' comments seemed very inconsistent, almost confusing. Hilary, Myron, and William presented inconsistent opinions. Early in the interview, Hilary's opinion of her second grade retention was positive, "I think it was the best for me." The retention event was not traumatic, according to Hilary, because she was in a combination class for two years, "And I just walked into the same class and it didn't really bother me." She received extra help during her second year in second grade, "I remember sitting in a table. It was a round table and there was a bunch of other kids that were slow readers like me. And being with this teacher..." Midway through the interview, I asked if being held back helped, and she replied, "I don't think I've improved. Well, maybe a little bit, clearly." Toward the end of the interview, Hilary seemed to generalize what she considered a prevailing perception of people who have been retained. She said, "Cause when I tell people that I stayed back in second grade, they are like, 'what are you, stupid or something?' I'm like, 'no, actually, I had a medical condition.' But, like who stays back in 2nd grade?"

Myron said he did not specifically remember being held back. Perhaps his lack of memory of the event is why being retained made no difference to him. However, he seemed to favor retention in some situations, "...it's basically just giving someone a second chance if they failed." Like Hilary, Myron seemed to

generalize what he thought was a common opinion about retainees. His explanation is captured in the following conversation:

Myron: I just think that you personally think just because someone was held back that they're ...I don't know...they're retarded or something. It's quite an ignorant belief. And a prejudice...in a way.

Christine : Are you getting some feelings from other folks that they think that you're retarded or something?

Myron: No. Of course not.

Christine: OK. So tell me where that belief is coming from.

Myron: Well...I just personally think people think that about somebody who was held back once.

Christine : Oh. OK. But you haven't been treated that way.

Myron: No. Of course not.

Christine: Do other people know that you have been retained in elementary school?

Myron : Um Hmm.

Christine: Do they react differently to you?

Myron: (pause) No. I get this small joke that you were held back in kindergarten. That's about it.

Christine: A little teasing?

Myron: Yeah. 'Course I would do the same thing. C'mon it's kinda hard to believe you were held back in kindergarten.

Christine: I want to kind of explore this. This is a very powerful statement that you said about an ignorant belief that people are slower if they were held back.

Myron: Yes.

Christine: I wonder where that stems from.

Myron: I just think it's a natural thought people have and I think it's quite ignorant.

Christine: It's a natural thought that people have?

Myron: Yes.

Christine: Do you sometimes think that about other people that if you find out they were held back?

Myron: No. I don't even care.

Christine: But you have not been exposed to anybody treating you differently.

Myron: No. All you get is a little teasing, that's about it. I mean I don't really care.

Christine: OK. I'm just wondering where the basis of that belief is coming from. The evidence that you have to have that belief.

Myron: I don't really have evidence for it really. I just think it's a natural thought people have and it's just...ignorant.

Christine: Huh. OK. That's interesting. 'Cause you...

Myron: Like a natural thought about someone who's drinking a margarita and the guy's gay. You know it's a natural thought people have.

One other participant seemed to be inconsistent with his responses. Initially, William said he was not upset he was retained, “I wasn’t too upset because I didn’t really have that many friends in kindergarten...” Later in the interview, I asked him if being held back made any difference and he responded, “No, not really.” At the end of the interview, I asked him about his general views on retention and he said, “Um I think...If it’s like kindergarten, if they’re kindergarten and they’re having a little bit of struggle, maybe they should be held back. But probably an extreme case. But then on, I don’t really think someone should be held back.”

The table located in Appendix I shows the responses from the participants regarding their current feelings about being held back. The table located in Appendix J presents the data regarding how participants viewed retention in general.

On dropping out of school. Some conversations with participants lead me to inquire about dropping out. Seven participants illustrated their views on dropping out of school. Three participants may have come close. Demetrius talked about how hard it was to go to school, “It was just really hard to go to school. It was just hard for like my mom to take care of all three of us. And going to school.” I asked him if he ever considered dropping out of school, and he answered, “No. It’s just dumb. And overall I just, my dad keeps telling me, ‘Get your education. And go on and do something with your life.’ That’s the number one thing. Education.” Dawn said she considered dropping out when she felt she could no longer endure the bullying. She said this about her friends and why she didn’t drop out of high school, “I would tell them what happened, or they would hear it and would stand up for me or they would just try and comfort me. When I told them I was thinking of dropping out, they said,

you know, we've been friends for years. You can't drop out. You can't ditch us." Like Dawn, Jeff considered dropping out when his friends graduated before him. He said this about his dad's support, "And when they all left, I had nobody to talk to. And then, I just didn't want to be here anymore. And I started talking to my dad more about it and my dad had a long talk with me and said, 'You're not dropping out.' He said, 'I don't want you to drop out.'"

Jacqueline almost dropped out after her grandmother died. Had it not been for her aunt, she might not have graduated. She said, "I did basketball for almost the whole year. I had got kicked off, um for my grades. ... but my mama, she got, she almost killed herself for overdosing on pills. And then on top of that, after that happened, my grandma died. And my life was just like, ruined. And I really didn't care anymore afterwards. And um, after that, um, my grades was already in the gutter, so um, and it was the ending so it's like whatever. I can't pull 'em up now; I can't do anything so why bother. I had a talk with my aunt. She pulled me back in, 'cause I was out. Probably would have been a dropout and then, somewhere, I don't know where I would be."

Other participants said they didn't consider dropping out. Heather talked about the impact of being held back and the influence of her uncle, "Looking back on it now, I don't really, it don't bother me because I've made it this far being held back. It doesn't bother me. My uncle told me that when he got held back and got to high school, he thought about dropping out, but his parents wouldn't let him. But I haven't wanted to drop out 'cause I made it this far. It hasn't even crossed my mind." Without my asking or probing, Hilary offered her thoughts on the subject, "I

get A's and B's. I try my hardest. I wouldn't want to drop out." Donna talked about having to endure being picked on in school and had this to say about dropping out of high school, "I used to beg my mom if I could like stay home and be home schooled. I have considered being home schooled before but NEVER dropping out. I think dropping out of high school is a bit ridiculous. 'Cause I think if you made it this far in life, you might as well just go a few more years before you graduate. That way, you'll at least have, at least you're somewhere in life and not nowhere. 'Cause I feel if you drop out, you get your G.E.D., and then you're like, Oh 40 years from now, you're like 'dang', I wish I would have graduated high school, so I could have done this.' 'Cause after you like drop out, you only have like what, you're 21? And then, it's like after that point, you can't go back in high school, so what are you supposed to do? So, I definitely would not have dropped out." Ben talked about graduating from high school instead of dropping out, "Well, I'm just glad I'm making it through high school. Because not everybody does that either." I asked him if he ever considered dropping out, and he answered, "No. It wasn't really a choice. I mean, my parents wouldn't let me and I just never considered it because I know that I actually want to grow up to be something and make something of myself." Later in the interview, Ben talked about the relationship between retention and dropping out, "I mean, it's not so much of the whole thing that makes people drop out. That's not true. Only a kid can predict whether he wants to drop out or not. Or whether she wants to drop out or not. It has nothing to do with what the teachers do. 'Cause all they're doing, they're there to help you and help you be

successful. It's really your choice whether you want to drop out or not. 'Cause nobody can make your decisions for you."

Advice From Those With Experience

"Well, don't take the decision lightly, whatever you do."

–Victor

This is the smallest section, representing 40 coded responses. The section was created from participants' responses to the last question of the interview protocol, "What advice would you give teachers and principals as they consider retention for a child?" Themes are indicated in Table 9. The strength of the themes is documented by the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response. The components of this section and the themes that emerged are illustrated in Figure 12. Interpretation of the evidence includes a summation of the themes and answers to a research question. Evidence is presented by documented examples of direct quotes from the participants.

Five different pieces of advice were given by four participants that did not fit into the other themes. Because qualitative studies illustrate the richness of experiences, those pieces of advice are included in the data. Consistent with the holistic approach (Patton, 2002) to analyzing qualitative data, these single pieces of advice add dimension and depth to the complexities of the participants' perspectives.

Table 9

Themes for Advice from Those with Experience

Themes	<i>Number of Coded Responses</i>	<i>Number of Participants in the Responses</i>
Provide Extra Help	13	10
Involve Parents	7	6
Check Up On Them	5	3
Don't Hold Them Back	4	4
Involve the Student	3	3
Extra Person to Help	3	3

Figure 12. Themes for Advice from Those with Experience

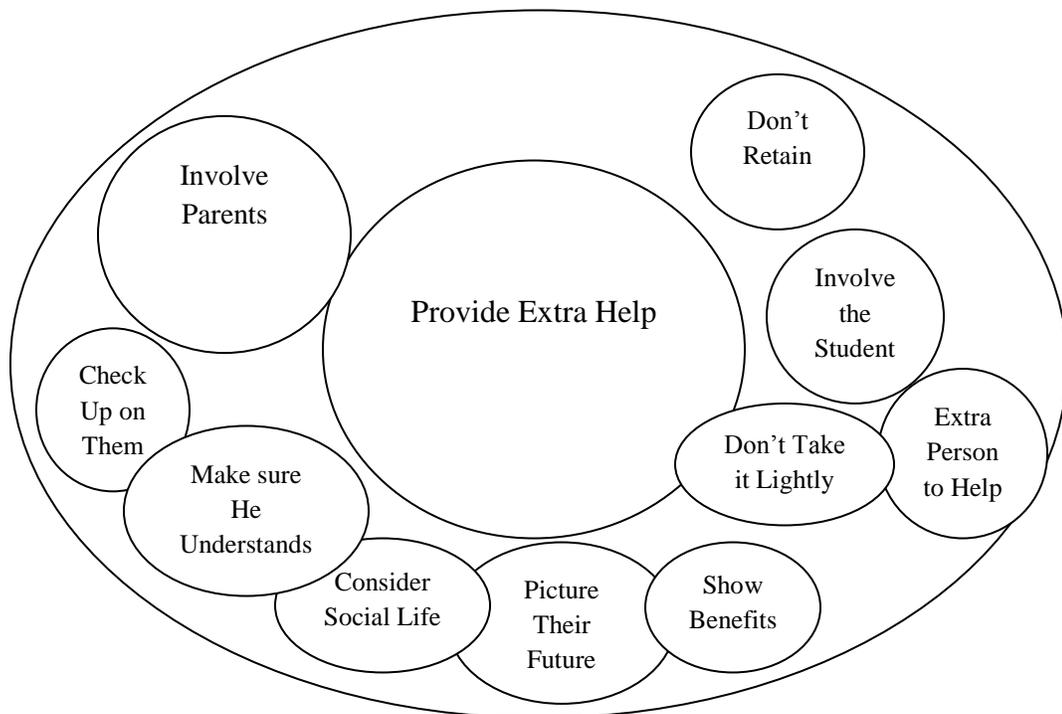


Figure 12. Strengths of themes and subclusters are shown by relative size of each circle. Strengths are based on the frequency of the coded responses and the number of different participants quoted for each response.

Interpretation of Advice From Those with Experience

I asked every participant to give me advice about whether or not to hold students back in elementary school. Also, I asked them what to do differently once I made the decision to retain a child. All of the participants answered me with their opinions about retention and/or advice. Some participants placed themselves in the center of their advice. The voices of little retained children came through the words of those participants. Other participants seemed to set their experiences apart from their advice. A few participants seemed to wrestle with their thoughts as they responded.

In general, most participants made the suggestion to provide extra help if the student is struggling, whether or not the child is held back. This was the dominant theme of this section. Participants made suggestions regarding extra help based on their personal experiences. For example, they suggested after-school tutoring, or pulling students out of class for small group instruction.

Several participants suggested involving parents. These suggestions came from participants whose parents were involved in the decision and from participants who did not mention their parents' involvement in the decision. Therefore, personal experience may or may not have figured in their advice.

Three participants made the suggestion to check up on the student as the student matriculated through the grades and later on in their educational careers. Many participants continued to struggle academically in one content area or another. Perhaps this suggestion stems from their lack of confidence and a desire for continued support.

Four participants advised against retention altogether. Three of the four, however, said there might be situation warranting retention. Generally, they suggested early interventions as an alternative to holding students back.

Three participants gave single pieces of advice about the decision-making process. Generally stated, the collective advice was to take the decision seriously, consider the present situation, consider the child's future, and, if the decision is to retain, then make the child feel good about the decision.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #1: "How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school?" It seemed the voices of retained children spoke through the advice given by some of the participants. Some of the advice echoed the experiences of the participants. For example, some participants suggested after school tutoring or pulling struggling students out of class for small group instruction. The extra help provided to these students seemed to help them academically; therefore, retention helped them academically.

For some participants, retention was neither a benefit nor a hindrance. It was simply another year in school. These participants advised against retention and suggested alternatives to providing academic support.

Provide extra help. Ten participants expounded upon giving students extra help before and after retention. Michael suggested that teachers help their students, "Just be more willing to help your students. 'Cause I know that's what helped me was that if a teacher was there by my side asking me if I needed help with almost

every assignment. Especially when we're young in elementary school, we don't know as much. I mean some of our skills haven't evolved yet." Heather had a similar response, "Giving her the extra help to see if it benefits." Ben talked about the advantage of extra help, "If he needs more help, that's about it. Just like if he needs the help, just get him a little bit more help. 'Cause when I was little, I got help and now I'm, I'd like to think of myself as smart." Although she did not describe her advice in terms of extra help, Aliah wanted to make sure the retainees understood the content during the second year. She said, "Maybe just teach her like more, just see if like he or she can understand it, like more. Like you know some kids are like scared of even ask, um, ask the teacher for help and stuff which would probably make it worse for them. So I would just, I think I would just try to see if they understand it the second time around."

Some participants suggested small group instruction in a separate setting. William said, "Maybe just like take them to a separate room and uh, help 'em out with what they need to learn. Maybe take them outside the classroom." Hilary suggested something similar, "Um, maybe have like a group, like I did. That you would go to a certain time of the day and read and do or whatever that she's struggling with. And do some activities." Heather suggested pulling a retainees out of class for extra help, "Like have somebody pull her out the next go around." Anthony gave similar advice, "... I guess you could see if they started to struggle, and I guess try to pull 'em out of class and try to help them with what they're struggling in." Kelly gave similar advice based on her experience, "I remember

there were some times like I'd have this uh, lady would take me out of class and help me with whatever I needed."

Staying after school or working with a tutor seemed to be popular advice. Donna, who advised against retention, offered this alternative, "...talk to the parent about it and see if they agree like 30 minutes after school, have them stay for extra reading, extra math work or something." Joyce assumed extra help would be provided when she gave her opinion about retention, "If they're not, if the extra work of tutors and going beyond the classroom, the help is just not helping them, you know, do what you think is right." Joyce went on to explain how to provide support if a child was held back and still not making progress, "And if there isn't, now you know that she needs after school tutoring on Tuesdays and Thursdays and just really make sure she's catching up on the level that she needs to be."

Involve parents. Six participants advised speaking with the parents. Emily suggested parental involvement in the decision, "I definitely think you should consult with the parents ahead of time. And maybe throughout the year, just meet with the parents, not so much the student, and talk to them about it." Caroline also proposed having a conversation with parents, "And when you make the decision and you talk to them and their parents, and just be honest." Ben had similar advice, "And the only thing about holding kids back is that the only thing you should worry about is like, discuss it with the parents. And if the parents agree, then it should be perfectly fine." Anthony suggested talking to the parents and the student simultaneously about the decision to retain, "I would talk it over with the child and his parent at the same time."

Two participants suggested involving parents earlier. William, who said retention should occur only in extreme cases, said, “You know, try to get their parents involved so they could help them learn better. Like William, Myron advocated for parent support, especially in middle school. I asked him what should be considered when the decision was made to hold a child back. He responded, “Make it clear that, well if it’s a small child, you can’t really do that much. But if it’s middle school, you still can’t do that much without the parent’s support.”

Check up on them. Three participants were concerned about the years following the retention. Caroline suggested checking in on retainees the following year, “Like, if they’re held back and you see ‘em in the hall and you talk to them, you ask them, ‘How was your day? How’s everything going? How’s this?’ And be just like, I’m glad everything’s going good.’ Just be able to relate with them and just checking on them and seeing how they’re doing. And letting them know that you care. And just giving them that educational support. And just being there and letting them know that they can talk to you anytime that they need to. And it can’t, it can be about something that they’re struggling with or just they just wanted to talk and tell you how everything is going.” Joyce gave similar advice, “I would check up more and make sure that her needs and academic areas are being met now. And she’s making more progress. And if there isn’t, now you know that she needs after school tutoring on Tuesdays and Thursdays and just really make sure she’s catching up on the level that she needs to be. And making sure possibly she’s OK psychologically. Maybe if she needs to talk to a guidance counselor.” Morgan’s advice echoed Caroline’s and Joyce’s, “But I think, personally, that they should

have, once you've been held back, once you get into high school, or middle school, they should've done something to the kids that got held back. Because they kinda held you back for that year, but no one ever came back and said, 'Are you doing OK? Did it help you? Especially when you're getting into high school. Someone, you know, just kinda coming back to touch base. Touching up and making sure everything's alright.'"

Don't hold them back. Three participants seemed to hold strong opinions about not holding students back. Donna was not ambivalent about her feelings when I asked her how she felt about the practice of retention. She said, "I kind of think it's ridiculous. Depending on like what you're being held back for. Like I can understand if you made all F's and you didn't try. And you skipped school like every day. You just don't want to be here. I could understand holding someone back for that. But holding 'em back for not being mature enough or actually I just kind of think like missing days, as long as the person is passing the class, like passing all of the class, I feel like missing days shouldn't be that big of a deal. As long as their work's all turned in and everything's done, I think you should be able to go on. The teacher should spend a lot of time on reading with their students than not reading and doing like paperwork. And like, I don't know, I guess like paperwork. Like math, Like English, I would make sure they had a bunch of reading."

I asked Donna what to do about students who do not perform on grade level, and she recommended, "Then I would probably work with the student, like maybe offer a tutor. That way, you're not held back and like talk to the parent about it and

see if they agree like 30 minutes after school. Have them stay for extra reading, extra math work or something.” Mandy was quick to offer her opinion on the practice, “I think in elementary school, it’s kind of dumb. Cause they’re little kids. I mean, yeah, they know better, but you know, they’re probably going to grow out of it. Like in middle school, or high school, I can understand, but. Just ‘cause, in high school, they’re lazy and they don’t do their work, then hold ‘em back since it’s their fault. If you do your work and stuff, I don’t think you should be held back. Like Mandy, Al suggested that effort be rewarded with promotion, “I don’t think you should because you know that he hasn’t given up on what he’s been doing. He might not get it, but he’s trying. And so I don’t think he should be held back.”

One other participant seemed to wrestle with retaining students. William said, “Um I think, if it’s like kindergarten, if they’re kindergarten and they’re having a little bit of struggle, maybe they should be held back. But probably an extreme case. But then on, I don’t really think someone should be held back.”

Involve the student. The three oldest retainees suggested involving students in the decision, or at least the discussion. Jeff and Melissa were held back in fifth grade; Anthony was held back in fourth grade. Jeff suggested the student take part in the decision, “I feel like they should have a say so in it. ‘Cause they know, you know, they know themselves better than anyone does. Even if the parent thinks they do, the kid knows himself better.” Melissa’s advice seemed to concur with Jeff’s, “I think they should be told. They should be in with the conversation, not just all of a sudden, they’re back in 5th grade.” Anthony echoed the other two, “I would talk it over with the child and his parent at the same time. And I would ask him if he or she

really wanted to stay back a grade. And if not, I guess you could see if they started to struggle, and I guess try to pull ‘em out of class and try to help them with what they’re struggling in. Or try to help them overcome what they’re in.”

Extra person to help. As an alternative to retention, Donna suggested help from a tutor, “Then I would probably work with the student, like maybe offer a tutor.” Two other participants suggested outside support. Michael recalled receiving help from a teacher’s assistant, “If they had, like usually, they had, like there was an assistant. And the assistant would get up and walk around while the teacher’s doing the problems on the board. That’s what kind of helped. Just having somebody that would help when you needed it.” Jacqueline’s experience with Big Sisters Organization prompted this response, “Do you all do Big Sisters and Big Brothers? Um maybe um, they should be entered into that program.”

Single pieces of advice. Three participants gave advice which did not fit in any of the above categories. While they would not be considered a theme, it is necessary to consider each piece of advice to gain a deep understanding of the participants’ perspectives on the effects of being held back in elementary school. They are included in order to complete the holistic analysis of the phenomenon.

Dawn, who considered her first year in kindergarten a wasted year because she made no friends, said to consider the child’s social life. She said, “Definitely talk to the student. If the student doesn’t really care about school, if they’re very, whatever, um and the teacher doesn’t really have much to say about the student, definitely look deeper into it. You know, get to know the student. And I think

definitely knowing how the student is socially. If the student has lots of friends, and you're going to hold them back, they're going to be hindered greatly."

Emily gave two pieces of that seem to have been rooted in personal experience. She said this about deciding whether or not to retain, "I guess picture the kid's future." Once the decision has been made to retain, Emily suggested ways to help the child cope with being held back. She said, "I guess I would try and make them feel comfortable. Make them proud of it. If they're proud of it, then I think they'll go far and they'll be OK with it." I asked how to go about making retainees comfortable and proud of being held back. She responded, "I would just show them all the benefits that will come from it. Have them sit down with someone who was held back. Have them work with someone who was. I mean, there are plenty of high school students who would probably be happy to help."

Victor had very little recollection of his retention, but he was contemplative when offering advice. He said, "Well, don't take the decision lightly, whatever you do. I mean if you know something about this kid whether he should move on or what, take that account to your decision. But, like I said, you gotta take times with these. You have to think about these decisions really thoughtfully because maybe this kid could go, maybe this kid could go in the first grade. Maybe he could make it through first grade really well. I'm talking if he was coming out of kindergarten like myself. To be honest, it's just a choice of making a decision and living by the consequence."

Social Histories

“And I one day was like, ‘Why is everybody whispering?’ to my parents. And then they were just like um, ‘maybe she needs to go to the doctor.’” — Hilary

The table located in Appendix K displays the broad range of participants’ social histories. Generally, participants had few birth issues, behaved well in school, and attended school regularly. Also, the participants enjoyed a wide range of hobbies and interests, many of them sports related. Several suffered from illnesses that played a role in the retention process.

Academic Records

“...my test scores. They don’t define me.” – Emily

The tables located in Appendix L and M display information obtained from participants cumulative records. Not all of the information was found in school records. For example, GPA, ACT or SAT scores were not included in some cumulative records. Some students did not attend elementary school in North Carolina; therefore EOGs scores did not exist for those students. Proficiency in reading or math is indicated by a score of 3 on the EOG. Above proficiency in reading or math is indicated by a score of 4 on the EOG. Overall, the participants performed well on the EOGs.

Records were examined after completing the interviews. There were some startling discoveries. One record may have indicated that Anthony was retained twice, although he reported being held back only in fourth grade. The record is unclear about his kindergarten retention. There are two entries for kindergarten, however, the number of days in attendance, which would indicate partial years, was

either faded or not entered. Anthony is almost a year older than the other participants; however, he is only two weeks older than the next oldest participant. Al mentioned during his interview that he thought he was held back in 2nd grade, although he was not sure. His school records indicate he was retained in third grade.

Another discovery from examining school records is the amount of participants involved in Special Education. Fourteen of the 22 participants participated in a Special Education Program. Some students remembered being pulled out for extra help, however, most of them did not describe themselves as special education learners. I did not examine the Special Education files for the participants; therefore, I was unable to determine the type of special education program in which the participants participated.

The participants' responses from this section addressed Research Question #2: What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during and after they were retained in elementary school? There is evidence that all of the participants received extra academic help in elementary school. Some of the academic interventions were intense in that the students participated in Special Education.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to add to the qualitative literature in order to better understand the phenomenon of being held back from the perspectives of some high school seniors with those experiences who have achieved success in school. Also, it sought to inform the educational community regarding retention decisions in elementary school.

Educators, counselors, and psychologists have been involved in the debate regarding grade retention and social promotion for decades dating back to the 1920s. Educational and psychological literature have well represented proponents' and opponents' arguments about the emotional, social, and academic impact of being held back. Some quantitative studies have attempted to link retention with dropping out of school. Others show that retention can benefit some students. Quantitative studies often oversimplify the complexities of this phenomenon. Qualitative studies have not completely explored all the nuances and intricacies of the impact of being held back in school from the perspectives of those with such experiences. This study attempted to fill a void in the qualitative literature.

This study attempted to describe how 22 successful high school seniors viewed their experiences with being held back in elementary school. High school seniors' academic, social, and home environments at the time they were retained were reconstructed based on interview data, school records, and social history inventories. Additionally, current achievement data, current perceptions of school, and immediate plans after graduation were included to further understand the participants. The transactions between the participants and their environments were

examined to determine what may have enabled their resiliency from the retention event.

A conceptual discussion of the findings is organized around the four research questions presented in this study:

1. How do high school seniors on track to graduate with a college preparatory diploma feel about their having been held back in elementary school?
2. What were the parenting, social, and educational environments of these seniors before, during, and after they were retained in elementary school?
3. What are high school seniors' perceptions of how transactions between those environments over time shaped them into the people they are now?
4. What characteristics of resiliency, if any, did these seniors seem to possess that may have contributed to their success?

Following the presentation of findings, this chapter concludes with the meaning of the study and a reflection about the implications of holding students back in elementary school.

Research Questions and Answers

The questions were answered multiple times across several categories of data. Data ranged from the innermost feelings of the participants to their home environments at the time they were held back in school to their current involvement in school. School records, interviews, and artifacts submitted by participants were used to answer the research questions.

Question 1: Feelings about being held back. Friends were integral in the lives of the participants. Some participants said being held back enabled them to

find a different and often better group of friends. While they were initially concerned about losing their friends, most of them made friends easily as they were held back. Pittman (1991) found that students who identified with school tended to stay in school. School identification generally stemmed from social integration within the school setting. Interaction with friends contributed to social integration. Pittman's finding was consistent with the findings from this study. Friends seemed to help the participants identify with school. Some participants maintained friendships in both grade levels, but felt left behind when their original friend set graduated high school before them.

Many of the participants put a positive spin in their retention. Some were glad they were held back because they viewed the retention as an opportunity to catch up academically or emotionally. Others understood the reason behind their retention, accepted it and moved on. Participants' memories of their initial reactions upon learning of their retention spanned a wide continuum of emotions. Generally, the participants who were held back in kindergarten or first grade reported having little recollection, or they exhibited less negative emotions than those who were retained in later grades. Participants who were retained in later grades, such as fourth or fifth grade, expressed more anger than sadness at not moving up with their friends.

More than half of the participants recalled being upset when they learned they were going to be held back. Knowing their friends would move on without them was the source of most of the sadness. Some of the participants were upset at

not being promoted, which caused them to have self-deprecating thoughts. Because they were not promoted, those participants felt they were not as smart as their peers.

Some participants said they were relieved to be held back because their first year was difficult. Either they struggled academically, or they had no friends.

Participants' current reflections about their retention were varied. About half of the participants said retention helped them; about half claimed retention had no impact. Based on their experiences, most of the participants suggested that struggling students in any grade should receive extra help. A few participants advocated providing students with extra help as an alternative to retention. Nevertheless, the long-term impact of being held back in elementary school was unique for each participant.

Question 2: Parenting, social, and educational environments.

Participants' parental environments varied; however, most common was strong maternal support. All but one participant described a mother who influenced, supported, and cared for them before, during, and after the retention event. In general, family support was evident in the lives of every participant. These findings complimented research on dropouts: unsatisfactory relationships with family were characteristic of dropouts (Beck & Muia, 1980; Pittman, 1986; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Pittman, 1991.)

About half of the participants faced challenges at home such as divorce, death, mobility, and poverty. There was a high incidence of poverty among the participants. However, poverty did not appear to be determining factor in the participants' graduation from high school. Some of the participants faced challenges

common to many students. A few faced enormous challenges. It is important to note that all of the participants faced their challenges and found ways to overcome them. None of them gave up.

School seemed to be a positive place for the participants. They enjoyed deep and long-lasting friendships with school mates. Also, they remembered positive social events in elementary school and shared many pleasant memories. Throughout high school, most of the participants were involved in sports or other extracurricular clubs. Participation in these activities seemed to bind students to high school. Pittman (1991) found that students who are satisfied with school and identify with school are more likely to stay in school. Extracurricular clubs and activities seemed to facilitate school identification for the participants. This study complimented the research by Pittman and Haughwout (1987) who noticed a decrease in the number of dropouts in those students who participated in extracurricular activities.

All of the participants could describe in detail their academic struggles. Most of the problems were in reading; however, math proved to be a barrier for many. Reading seemed to improve over time more than math. For most of those who were deficient in math, what started out as a barrier, continued to be a weakness in later years, as well.

Over half of the participants in this study were in Special Education, as documented in the cumulative records. It was interesting to note, however, most of the participants did not mention being in Special Education. Individualized Education Plans were not part of the data; therefore, disability categories could not be determined. It is reasonable to assume that disabilities could range from speech

articulation to high functioning autism. In other words, participants could have been provided support within a wide range of intensity. Nevertheless, most of the participants in this study were given specialized interventions.

Question 3: Transactions between environments. The most prominent transaction appeared to occur between family support and academic achievement. As mothers and other family members provided support, they created appropriate models for success. These models of success created environments of perseverance for the participants. In turn, the perseverance yielded more academic success. Having experienced some success, the participants' self concepts improved which made them more likely to set higher expectations for themselves. As they set higher academic expectations of themselves, they achieved more.

In addition, a transactional process appeared to exist between participants' perceptions of their competence and positive feedback from teachers. As participants responded favorably to the extra help they received from teachers and felt more confident in their work, the teachers were more likely harbor favorable perceptions of their students' competencies. In turn, the students' self perceptions affected their sense of well being and made them more likely to receive positive attention from teachers. As teachers gave more positive attention, especially in the form of academic interventions, the participants experienced more success in school.

Because the participants experienced success in some aspect of school, they seemed to feel included in their school environment. Whether success came from a specific content area or an extra-curricular organization, it seemed to have a positive

effect on the participants' sense of belonging. In turn, their involvement in a team sport or club made a positive impact on their perspective of school.

The retention event created a cascade of transactional social environments. As the participants were held back, they found a new and different set of friends. Most often, the new set of friends changed the trajectory of their interests and shaped them into different people than who they might have been otherwise. Most of the participants described their new set of friends as creating positive pathways for them.

Question 4: Resiliency. Research suggests that one of the protective factors for resiliency is supportive parents (Steinhauer, 1996; Janas, 2002). All of the participants said they had supportive parents or at least one supportive adult during the time they were held back in elementary school. Most of the supportive adults were the participants' mothers. However, every participant described how at least one adult helped them persevere.

Most of the participants exhibited an internal locus of control, which has been shown to be a characteristic of resiliency (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2010). They made very few excuses for their problems, even to the point of minimizing the effect of some challenges they faced. They seemed to be proud of their accomplishments, and they all looked toward a positive future in pursuing their goals and aspirations. All of the participants clearly articulated their goals.

Some research defines resiliency as a product of interventions that interrupt negative pathways (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). When the participants were retained, they found a new set of friends which changed their interests and broadened their

scope of life's possibilities. In this sense, the new set of friends appeared to have interrupted the negative social effects of retention.

Most of the participants valued their friends and their friendships. They seemed to have many friends. One characteristic of resiliency is the tendency to think of others. The number of friends reported by the participants would suggest they tend to think of others.

Research suggests a connection between emotional well being and success in school (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998). Participants seemed to be proud of overcoming their challenges. They talked of their self reliance, and many of them exuded self confidence during the interviews. It was evident to see how their sense of emotional well being was linked to their academic success.

Roberts (2003) found that resilient students liked school more than non-resilient students. Not only did the participants indicate school as being a positive place, but also, they perceived themselves to be successful in school.

The participants appeared to have fostered trusting relationships with adults, which, according to Woklow and Ferguson (2001), is a characteristic of resilient children. The participants talked favorably about their teachers in that they provided extra support, cared for them, and helped them beyond school. Several participants talked about having personal relationships with their teachers. The positive relationships between the participants and their teachers clearly contributed to the protective factors for resiliency.

Brooks and Goldstein (2001) stated that resiliency allows children to "bounce back from disappointments and adversity (p.1). The participants who recalled being

upset at the news of being retained generally seemed to move past the negative emotions once the new school year started. For the most part, the participants started the next school year with no mention of internalizing or externalizing negative emotions.

Limitations of the Study

Marshall and Rossman (2011) discussed the concept of crystallization as a way to present multiple perspectives. While several types of data were collected to create an accurate reflection of the participants' perceptions, social history data and school records contained several missing pieces. Time constraints prevented an exhaustive search to fill the voids.

Reliability is a concern with retrospective data (Henshaw, Foreman, and Cox, 2004), as is researcher bias in any qualitative study (Hill et al., 2005). However, retrospection can allow participants to reflect upon and assess their experiences with the new knowledge they gained over time.

Overall, results of qualitative studies lack generalizability. Such is the case with this study. However, qualitative research allows the possibility to go beyond the narrow interpretations of data and extrapolate other applications of the findings (Patton, 2002). Therefore, findings from this study can be used as lessons learned and be applied to future decisions regarding retention.

Conclusion

Results from this study suggest that elementary school retention can have a positive effect on students, no effect, or a negative effect which does not necessarily result in dropping out of high school. For some students, retention helped them

catch up or improve skills. Some students claim that being held back neither helped them nor hurt them. Still others claimed that retention caused them an extra year of unnecessary schooling. The educational outcome depends predominantly on the characteristics of the retainees and the transactions between their home, school, and social environments.

The most prominent protective factors for high school graduation for those who were held back a grade in elementary school were found to be:

1. Mother's support
2. Family support
3. Teacher support
4. Academic interventions provided
5. Emotional and behavioral well being
6. Resilient character
7. Participation in high school extra-curricular activities
8. Early grade retention (kindergarten through third grade)

All of these elements were evident throughout the data. Not every participant possessed all of these factors; however, all of the participants possessed most of them. The transactions between these factors resulted in positive developmental cascades for every participant. Developmental cascades are “the cumulative consequences for development of the many interactions and transactions occurring in developing systems that result in spreading effects across levels, among domains at the same level, and across different systems or generations” (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010, p. 491).

This study illustrated how elementary school retention is not the sole determining factor in a student's educational pathway. Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) said, "There is a homeorhetic tendency in development such that once a pathway is enjoined, numerous factors conspire toward its' continuation" (p. 320). However, the number of variables involved in the transactions between just one student and that student's environment are countless (Alexander et al., 2003). Indeed, Sameroff (personal communication, February 20, 2011) indicated that an enjoined pathway is not inevitable. He further stated that no factor is deterministic, but influenced by what happens next. Being held back a grade in elementary school did not determine the educational pathway for these 22 students. Retention was merely one of many factors along the developmental cascade for each of them. It was the variables involved in the transactions between these participants and their environments that resulted in their positive educational outcomes.

Implications for Practice

Educators are faced with ever-increasing demands for a more rigorous curriculum. The Common Core Curriculum, used by most states, requires children to demonstrate skills that will prepare them for advanced studies after high school. It is the responsibility of all educators to preserve the integrity of the educational system. Also, it is the responsibility of all educators to ensure the success of every student. Therefore, myopic approaches regarding retention will likely have detrimental results. Widespread social promotion will dilute the value of the high school diploma. Retaining students based on proficiency criteria alone may result in limited benefits. Educators should wrestle with these potential outcomes.

Struggling students who possess protective factors for high school graduation as indicated earlier may benefit from retention. When considering retention, educators ought to keep in mind that the goal for every child is high school graduation. Using all available information, educators should weigh carefully the student's environmental variables as they may impact the educational pathway.

Participants in this study changed my thinking regarding retention. Instead of considering retention as an intervention for catching up a year, I now consider retention as an intervention that could enable a student to make long term gains. The question to ask is: Will retention facilitate this student's high school graduation? As an educational leader, it is my responsibility to provide each child with an elementary education that will create opportunities for success in high school and beyond. The goal is not to be prepared for the next grade; the goal is to be prepared to graduate with a college-ready diploma.

In addition, retention candidates under my watch will need to possess most of the prominent protective factors for high school graduation listed above. While these protective factors should not be used as a checklist, they could serve as a guide when considering retention. The participants in this study exemplified most of these characteristics. A struggling student in my elementary school who lacks many of these protective factors will not be considered for retention. For example, a struggling student who exhibits behavior problems would not be a good candidate for retention based on my findings. Only a few participants in this study described discipline difficulties, and they were minor. Instead, they trusted adults, made no

excuses for their failures, responded well to structured environments, and made lasting relationships with friends.

Lessons learned from these participants may serve to keep struggling learners from dropping out of school. The importance of challenge was evident in the findings. These students understood their challenges and possessed the qualities of resilience to meet them. Some of the participants, by accident or by interest, found themselves being pushed to improve. For example, several students said they became more confident as a result of their involvement in theater. Also, the challenge of competing in sports gave them a sense of competence that may have offset feelings of academic failure. Challenge gave these participants purpose. It is incumbent upon all educators to create challenging environments for students.

Another lesson learned was the importance of setting high expectations. Every participant talked of reaching goals. Each of them articulated specific plans after graduating from high school. Failing a grade in school did not appear to define them as learners, nor did it brand them. Throughout school, they continued to seek opportunities to make themselves better. They seemed to know what they wanted and understood what they needed to do to attain their goals.

A final lesson learned was the importance of being pushed. Every participant was pushed by someone who cared about them. Most of the participants were pushed by more than one influential adult in their lives. Their parents motivated them and their teachers inspired them. Parents did not allow failure to hold their children back from ultimate success. They supported their children through educational setbacks and challenges. These participants did not make excuses. It is

likely they were not allowed to use their learning difficulties as excuses for not succeeding. Educators and parents should push children to succeed and provide the support necessary to overcome barriers.

The decision to retain students may or may not always be in the hands of educators or parents. Mandatory retention policies for those students who do not meet proficiency criteria are becoming more popular among states. The decision to socially promote or hold students back may soon be removed from the responsibilities of educators. Until then, educators must consider the unique characteristics and environmental factors of each student when deciding upon retention or social promotion. Even as failure occurs, lessons learned from these participants can propel students past setbacks and toward a productive, satisfying future.

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Appendix A: Release of Educational Records Consent

Release of Educational Records

Consent Form
For Students 18 Years Old or Older

I give my school counselor permission to release my name to Christine Smith so that she may contact me to discuss my experiences with being retained in elementary school.

(Name of Student, please print)

(Date of Birth)

(Signature of Student)

(Date)

(Phone number where student can be reached)

Release of Educational Records
Parent Consent and Student Assent Form
For Students Under 18 Years Old

I give my child's school counselor permission to release my child's name to Christine Smith so that she may contact my child to discuss his/her experiences with being retained in elementary school.

(Name of Student, please print)

(Date of Birth)

(Signature of Parent)

(Date)

I give my school counselor permission to release my name to Christine Smith so that she may contact me to discuss my experiences with being retained in elementary school.

(Name of Student, please print)

(Date of Birth)

(Signature of Student)

(Date)

(Phone number where student can be reached)

Appendix B: Informed Consent

As part of a graduate school course in Educational Leadership at Western Carolina University, I am conducting research for my dissertation. I am working under the direction of Professor, Dr. Mary Jean Herzog.

I am conducting research to understand high school seniors' perceptions of their experiences with being retained in elementary school. I am interested in what they remembered feeling at the time when they were retained – the social and emotional impact. I want to know how they overcame (if they did) any difficulties they may have suffered. Also, I am interested in how being retained in elementary school may or may not have helped them academically. I want to hear their stories. I am interviewing students who graduated in June, 2012 or will expect to graduation in June, 2013 from school districts in Western North Carolina.

Your involvement in this project involves telling your story about the time you were retained in elementary school and how being held back impacted you academically, socially, and emotionally. This will take about an hour. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time or decline to answer any question you choose. There are no foreseeable risks to you for participating in this study, however, I understand that you may feel uncomfortable about reflecting on a difficult time in your life. Prior to the interview, I will ask you to bring any information about your childhood and your education that may help me understand your experiences, such as your baby book, past report cards, test scores such as ACT, SAT, EOC, and EOG, and any other information regarding your home life during the time you were retained in elementary school. A social history survey is attached to give you some idea of the information I would like to gather. Your identity will be held strictly confidential. Names will be changed to protect confidentiality and the names of schools or school systems will not be identified or publicized. Even when direct quotations are used, you will not be identified by name or by any other identifying information.

If you have any questions, please contact me at any time: Christine Smith at 828-697-5568. You may contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Mary Jean Herzog, Department of Educational Leadership, Western Carolina University, at 828-227-3327. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Past Experience

1. Tell me about elementary school. What do you remember most?
2. What were the best parts of elementary school?
3. Tell me about your elementary school teachers? What did you like about your favorite teachers in elementary school? Tell me about them.
4. What parts of elementary school were easy for you?
5. What parts were not so easy? Talk about those challenges.
6. In what grade were you retained?
7. What do you remember about being retained in elementary school?
8. Why were you retained? What do you remember about that event?
9. Did you know at the time that you were struggling? If so, how did you know?
10. How did you feel about the challenges you were facing at the time?
11. When did you first realize that you were going to be held back? How did you feel when you were first made aware that you would be repeating a grade?
12. If you were upset, then how did you overcome those feelings?
13. How did your family members react to your being retained?
14. What do you think was your teacher's perception of your retention?
15. Talk about your home life as you remember it before you were retained. How did it change throughout the years?
16. Talk about your education up until the time you were retained, e.g., did you stay in one school? Did you have friends? Did you like your teachers?
17. Talk about your second year in the grade in which you were retained. Were things different? If so, how?
18. Tell me about your teacher the year after you were retained?
19. Who has made a positive influence in your life?

Present Experience

20. How did being held back in elementary school affect your graduating from high school?
21. As a high school senior on track to graduate with a college prep diploma, you have had a successful educational career. Tell me about your successes in high school.
22. We all have challenges with our successes. Talk about the challenges you faced in high school.
23. How did you overcome those challenges?
24. What do you plan to do after you graduate from high school?
25. How do you feel about retention now?

Reflection on Meaning

26. You have reflected a lot about your experiences. Given those reflections, how has being retained affected you?
27. What is it like now talking about your past experience with being retained?
28. What advice would you give teachers and principals as they consider retention for a child?

Appendix D: Social History Inventory

1. How many members were in your family when you were retained in elementary school? What relation were they to you and how old were they?
2. What was your mother's level of education when you were retained?
3. What was your father's level of education when you were retained?
4. What was your family's level of income (per year) at the time you were retained?
 \$0 – \$16,750 \$16,751 - \$34,000 \$34,001 - \$68,000 \$68,000 >
5. What other immediate family members, if any, were held back in school?
6. What immediate family members, if any, did not graduate from high school?
7. As a child, did you have one special adult in your life that you could always count on? If so, who and what was your relation to him/her?
8. How many schools did you attend in elementary school?
9. What childhood illnesses and medical problems did you experience?
10. Describe in general any family changes or challenges that may have occurred when you were a child, i.e., divorce, death, automobile accident.
11. Describe your temperament as a baby.
12. Describe any behavior issues that you had in school.
13. What do you know about when you were born? Were you a full-term baby? How much did you weigh at birth? (Bring baby book)
14. What was your attendance like in school?
15. In what type of extracurricular activities have you participated? Hobbies?

Appendix E: Family History

Participant	Mom's level of education	Dad's level of education	Family's income	Family members held back in school	Family members dropped out of school	Family challenges
Michael	Some high school	-	17-34K	0	Mom, dad	Poverty, One parent: mom
Emily	4 yr college	<4 yr college	-	Mom, cousin	cousin	Illness of infant brother, Job change for dad
Aliah	Some high school	-	<16	brother	mom	Poverty, Moved around a lot, single parent
Victor	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	68K+	0	0	none
Jacqueline	Junior high school	-	<16K	brother	mom	Poverty, Mom's drug use and prostitution, DSS removed her from home
Caroline	High school grad	High school grad	-	none	none	none
William	Some high school	Some college	Mom: <16,750; Dad: 34 — 68	-	mom	divorce
Al	H.S.	2 yrs college	-	none	none	Parents split in 2 nd grade
Myron	College	Less than high school	Upper Middle Class	-	dad	Moved
Heather	High school	High School	-	uncle	none	none
Mandy	High School	High School	Upper Middle	none	none	none
Hilary	High school	High school	Lower Middle Class	none	Grand parents	none
Donna	Technical college	College	-	brother	none	Divorce, moved,

						changed schools
Kelly	High school	< high school	-	brother	dad	Divorce, murder in family
Ben	High school	< high school	Poverty	Sister (kinder)	Dad, brother	Poverty, Parents split, dad's alcoholism
Demetrius	-	H.S.	Lower Middle Class	Twin Bro	-	Poverty, group home, single parent
Melissa	H.S. some college	H.S.	Lower Middle Class	no	no	Divorce, death of sister, moved
Anthony	College	Less than high school	Lower Middle Class	none	dad	Divorce, moved, grandmother died during his 4 th grade year
Dawn	Less than High School	Less than High School	-	none	Dad, mom	Mom in hospital a lot
Joyce	Tech college	Tech College	Upper Middle Class	no	no	Adopted by Gparents; automobile accident in elem school.
Morgan	college	2 yrs college	-	mom	none	Parent marital problems
Jeff	High school	Technical college	-	Dad – high school	none	Serious accident of grandfather, Death of grandfather,

Appendix F: Areas of Academic Difficulty

Participant	Grade Held Back	Area of Difficulty	Quote about Current Competence Level in Area of Difficulty
Victor	K	Math (high school.)	"Ichhh...so so-ish"
William	K	Reading	"I just never been a good reader."
Myron	K	Math	"Over time, it's gotten worse and worse over math."
Dawn	K	Math	"Math has just never been my subject. Even now."
Joyce	K	Reading	"When I took the SAT, reading was my lowest score."
Michael	1 st	Reading	-
Jacqueline	1 st	Reading	"If I get a good book, I could just sit there and read all day."
Caroline	1 st	Math	"I took a placement test and I placed out of my math classes."
Demetrius	1 st	Paying attention	"I just remember getting better grades in middle school and high school."
Morgan	1 st	Reading	"I'm still struggling, my spelling and my writing, but doing good."
Hilary	2 nd	Reading	"I mean my lowest grade right now is I think uh, 86 in English IV Honors."
Donna	2 nd	Reading	"I still hate it."
Al	3 rd	Math	"I think it was about, about 4 th grade where I started to get the hang of it."
Emily	3 rd	Math & Reading	Math: "We still have a love/hate relationship, that's for sure." Reading: "I actually love to read now."
Heather	3 rd	Reading & Math	Reading: "Better than what I was." Math: But I'm still not good with the math. I mean, I'm good to a point, but it's not the easiest."
Mandy	3 rd	Reading & Math	Reading: It's fine now." Math: "It's alright. I'm still kinda bad at it, so, it's not that bad."
Kelly	3 rd	Reading	"It's gotten better. I can read it and tell you about it. I just can't read it and write it."
Anthony	4 th	Reading	"Reading has always been a big problem for me."
Melissa	5 th	Math	"I'm really good in math now."
Jeff	5 th	Math	"But everything else, like basic math, I'm good at that."

Appendix G: Participants' Initial Reactions

Participant	Grade Retained	Quote about Initial Reaction
Victor	K	"No memories."
William	K	"I wasn't too upset because I didn't really have that many friends in kindergarten so. Thought it was another chance to meet some kids"
Myron	K	"Maybe first grade? It was weird like I was a year older. That's when I definitely realized."
Dawn	K	"I wasn't really that upset. I kinda realized it had been a wasted year."
Joyce	K	"I remember being upset that my best friend was going on to the first grade and I wasn't."
Michael	1 st	I kind felt like I was losing friends."
Aliah	1 st	"I was like, 'What? I got held back?' I was in shock."
Jacqueline	1 st	"I didn't realize it until freshman year...people started saying ages, and then it just kinda connected."
Caroline	1 st	"I was kind of shocked about it. And I didn't quite understand it. I really didn't get it."
Ben	1 st	"I was like, 'but why do I have to stay back when my friends get to move forward?' I was just kinda confused."
Demetrius	1 st	"I don't remember...talking about being held back."
Morgan	1 st	"I was like, 'Oh...OK.' But then, what really helped me was the same teacher."
Hilary	2 nd	"Like I don't even think they told me they had me stay back. I just remember having the same teacher for two years."
Donna	2 nd	"I think I was upset about it. 'Cause my friends all got to go on."
Al	3 rd	"So I gotta take this class over? I mean, that's just great. I was more embarrassed than sad."
Emily	3 rd	"I remember crying a lot, just breaking down in tears. Fighting with them about it, just saying that I could do it."
Heather	3 rd	"I started crying."
Mandy	3 rd	"I have a twin brother and I didn't want him to graduate before me."
Kelly	3 rd	"It was like when I came home, I was like, Mom, did you know they put me back in third grade?"
Anthony	4 th	"I cried because I did not want to be held back."
Melissa	5 th	"I didn't like it at first. I was kinda mad."
Jeff	5 th	"And I got mad and went to my room and was, you know, kinda shell shocked because I wasn't going to be with my friends anymore. And I got mad and I ended up punching my window.""

Appendix H: Reasons for Retention

Grade Held Back	Participant	Participant's Quotes
K	Victor	I don't know the full story of how I was retained. I think it was because my parents first taught me Spanish when I was little and Spanish, then English...
K	William	I knew it was 'cause I missed too many days and my dad didn't want me to go to summer school and so I had to repeat.
K	Myron	For some reason it was the school's decision, but I have no idea why though.
K	Dawn	I couldn't really see the board. I couldn't really play with other kids 'cause I couldn't really see to play on a playground. Um they kind of held me back 'cause of class activities and socially.
K	Joyce	But my parents felt that I wasn't emotionally ready to continue to the first grade because I would cry every day wanting to go home.
1	Michael	I wasn't reading up to date. Like she thought that I wasn't capable of doing all the things that the other students were doing.
1	Aliah	I didn't really know as much as them, but they was trying to pass me anyways. So my mom held me back. 'Cause she thought it would be a good thing instead of still being behind.
1	Jacqueline	Like my first grade year was sleeping most of the time. And so that's why...I didn't function well. So that's kinda why I got held back.
1	Caroline	Um, my teacher, actually she said that, for some reason, it was because of my writing. But I think I was probably up to par on it.
1	Ben	Well, I don't think I was academically ready. I don't think I was ready to move on because, again, I didn't pay a whole lot of attention.
1	Demetrius	My mom told me, I just forgot what she said. I'm not really sure.
1	Morgan	I think I was held back because of my reading skills and just comprehension of letters and all of that, I guess.
2	Hilary	I stayed back because of hearing loss had built up behind my ears um, so I couldn't hear. So my parents made me stay back.
2	Donna	My teacher told my parents that I wasn't mature enough to go on. But it could be because of reading, but I don't know.
3	Al	I have no idea.
3	Emily	My mom felt that I wasn't mature enough, um mentally to go on to the next grade.

3	Heather	I had to stay back and it was 'cause I wasn't good at reading. I was like reading first grade level and I didn't pass one of the EOGs.
3	Mandy	I'm pretty sure they said my reading level was low.
3	Kelly	But I failed my exams. That's why I got held back. 'Cause I was too involved in what they were doing. (parents' divorce)
4	Anthony	I've always struggled with reading. Uh, reading has always been a big problem for me.
5	Melissa	I wasn't failing but they think it'd be best if I stayed back in 5 th grade, because I wasn't ready to go to 6 th grade yet and handle all of the pressures of switching classes and having other classes and exploratories and not having one teacher.
5	Jeff	Mom didn't think I was ready 'cause of that math.

Appendix I: Participants' Current Thoughts on Retention

Participant	Grade Retained	Participant's Quote
Victor	K	"I'm only speaking for myself, it really hasn't affected me too much."
William	K	"I don't think it took anything away."
Myron	K	"Made no difference to me whatsoever."
Dawn	K	"I really think it helped me. If I hadn't had the friends I have from the second time, I would have dropped out."
Joyce	K	"If I was held back older, I'd probably have more negative feelings about it. But at such a young age, I was able to adapt quite easily."
Michael	1 st	"I mean, it's not that big of a deal to me anymore."
Aliah	1 st	"I think it made it better. If I would have kept moving on, I still wouldn't know certain stuff. Because I actually caught up with the kids."
Jacqueline	1 st	"...if I didn't get retained, then...I wouldn't know some of the stuff for the next grade. But now I look back over it, I feel grateful for it."
Caroline	1 st	"It made me stronger. It did help me academically."
Ben	1 st	"I think it helped me as a person...to grow and be smarter now."
Demetrius	1 st	"I don't think there's a difference, being held back or just going to second grade."
Morgan	1 st	"I don't think I could have done this without the extra year of really doing the reading comprehension. I don't think I would be at the same level that I'm at. I really don't regret it at all."
Hilary	2 nd	"I don't think it's made a difference. It does make me feel old."
Donna	2 nd	"I think in reality, it didn't do much. I don't think it mattered."
Al	3 rd	"I don't really look at it as a setback on my life."
Emily	3 rd	"I learned a lot more. I made better friends. I actually like the class that I graduated with more so than the class I was in."
Heather	3 rd	"Now looking at it, it helped me more."
Mandy	3 rd	"Well I think I would have been fine. Like I know it helped me and stuff, but I could've gotten that in 4 th grade."
Kelly	3 rd	"I think it helped because it gave me more time to get myself together."
Anthony	4 th	"I guess it made me graduate later than I should have, but I'm fine with that because it actually helped me out in the long run."
Melissa	5 th	"I think that getting held back was a good thing. It helped me out a lot. I wasn't academically ready, and I wasn't mentally...mature."
Jeff	5 th	"I mean it's put a lot of stress on me...I don't really think it was a good choice."

Appendix J: Participants' Current Thoughts on Retention in General

Grade Retained	Participant	Participant's Quotes
K	Victor	To be honest, I don't even know enough about it to even say something.
K	William	If it's like kindergarten, if they're kindergarten and they're having a little bit of struggle, maybe they should be held back. But probably an extreme case. But then on, I don't really think someone should be held back.
K	Myron	It's basically just giving someone a second chance if they failed. It doesn't hurt you in any way. I mean if you think it did, then it was your own fault in the first place for getting retained, now then wasn't it?
K	Dawn	It really depends on the relationship between the teacher and the student.
K	Joyce	Academically, if they're below where they should be...if tutoring wasn't efficient and you know, making the extra effort in helping that child, I believe that holding them back is a good decision. Um, I think they'll benefit from it.
1	Michael	I guess you wouldn't really know until like later on down the road.
1	Aliah	Like if you don't think they will like do well in the next grade..I think it's best for them to get retained. ...just so they don't really be way behind and feel like why they're not better...like...like catching up with anybody else. Like why they don't know certain things.
1	Jacqueline	And they probably would do better in any situation of dealing with school when they get held back because they're going to learn that second time more than they learned the first time.
1	Caroline	I think that it's not necessarily a bad thing. Because you never know who you're going to wind up meeting. And...you never know what's going to happen if you don't, if you get held back and you go on and you have a great school career, then it's going to come out positive. And if you have people that support you, and just lead you the way you need to be lead, it's going to be fine. And there's where you lose your friends that you made, but at the same time, you're going to gain new ones. And that just makes you a better person.
1	Ben	I mean, it's not so much of the whole thing that makes people drop out. That's not true. Only a kid can predict whether he wants to drop out or not. So you can't really just throw them into the fire and let them just be behind the whole time. So, I mean, holding kids back is not a

		disadvantage. I promise, it's not. 'Cause it's actually a whole lot better. 'Cause you learn. It's like you learn a whole lot more and you get it a whole lot better.
1	Demetrius	I think it's probably good because, just start back over and like, I'm guessing it's like good 'cause just to do it over again and really focus.
1	Morgan	If it's what they need, and if it's right for them, then they definitely should.
2	Hilary	I don't want to say it's a bad thing. I guess it just depends on what they need to stay back for. And their personality, I guess.
2	Donna	I kind of think it's ridiculous. Depending on like what you're being held back for. Like I can understand if you made all Fs and you didn't try. And you skipped school like every day. I could understand holding someone back for that.
3	Al	It could be a good thing, but it could also be a bad thing. You know, some kids don't take being embarrassed too good. But then again, it could be a good thing just to let 'em know that this is important. You need this.
3	Emily	Maybe they learn that if they don't get their act together now. Maybe then that's how it will be for the rest of their life and they'll end up being somebody they don't want to be. Um. I think that if a student is struggling though and putting in the work, umm, then it's not a bad thing.
3	Heather	It's not as bad as what they make it seem to be.
3	Mandy	I think in elementary school, it's kind of dumb.
3	Kelly	I'd probably see about the major things they were struggling in. If it was just like little things, then...I'd probably let 'em go on. But if it was major, like reading, I'd be like, Yeah....you might want to like chill for another year.
4	Anthony	I would talk it over with the child and his parent at the same time. And I would ask him if he or she really wanted to stay back a grade. And if not, I guess you could see if they started to struggle, and I guess try to pull 'em out of class and try to help them with what they're struggling in. Or try to help them overcome what they're in.
5	Melissa	It's not a bad thing to be held back. That it could help her. It will help her out.
5	Jeff	I feel like they should have a say so in it. 'Cause I feel like kids now a days don't really have any like, not really authority, but like a say so in things.

Appendix K: Social Histories

Participant	Birth issues	Temperament as a baby	Childhood illnesses and medical problems	How many schools attended in elem	Behavior issues in school	School attendance	Hobbies, extra curricular activities
Michael	none	Happy baby	Asthma, digestive issues	1	none	good	Basketball, football
Emily	2 weeks over due, 50 hours of labor, Collic for 3 months	Happy baby	none	1	none	Up to the attendance limit	Hiking, rafting, nature
Aliah	none	Good	none	2	Irritable in early grades	Missed a lot of school in high school	Drawing
Victor	none	Happy baby	Broken arms	1	none	Perfect attendance award	Flying, youth orchestra, star gazing
Jaqueline	none	Happy baby	Chicken pox, allergies	1	Slept during school	Perfect attendance award	Basketball, volleyball, writing poetry
Caroline	none	Quiet baby	Appendectomy; scoliosis	3	none	Good other than illnesses	golf
William	none	Fussy baby		2	none	Good past kindergarten	Basketball, video basketball
Al	none	-	none	2	Often "not listening"	good	Football. Plays on varsity team
Myron	none	Happy baby	chickenpox	2	Good in elem., had a few incidents in middle school and high school	Skipped some high school classes	Video games
Heather	none	-	chickenpox	1	none	good	Piano
Mandy	Pre-mature (3 lbs)	-	ADD	2	none	good	cheering

Hilary	none	Happy baby	Hearing loss, tubes	1	none	good	Basketball softball, employed, horseback riding
Donna	Pre-mature	Sour face baby	none	5	none	good	Gymnastics, ballet, piano, singing, sports
Kelly	none	-	ADD, asthma	1	none	good	Cattle rancher, DARE
Ben	none	Happy baby	Asthma, obesity	1	talkative	good	All kinds of sports,
Demetrius	Pre-mature (twin)	Happy baby	none	5	Paying attention early in elem sch	When in group home: good	Sports, work, strong faith
Melissa	Over due by 2 weeks	Happy baby	Tumor in 8 th grade	3	none	good	Softball, dance, violin, singing, newspaper, camping
Anthony	None	Happy baby	Usual childhood illnesses	2	no	Barely missed any days	Com- petition skate team, dancing, theatre, sports
Dawn	3 weeks late	Fussy Baby	congenital nystagmus speech impede- ment	1	no	Pretty good	Writing, drama
Joyce	none	Happy baby	none	1	none	Perfect attendance	Sports, volunteer work, hiking, horseback riding
Morgan	Past full term	Cry baby, temper tantrums	ADD	3	none	good	SCUBA, Ballet, rows crew, employed
Jeff	none	Quiet baby	Asthma, ADD	2	Some in middle school	good	mechanic

Appendix L: Elementary School Records

Participant	Grade Held Back	Math EOG 3 rd	Reading EOG 3 rd	Math EOG 4 th	Reading EOG 4 th	Math EOG 5 th	Reading EOG 5 th	Comments
Victor	K	3	3	3	3	4	3	Special Education
William	K	3	3	4	3	3	4	Special Education
Myron	K	3	4	-	-	-	-	Myron was home-schooled in 4 th and 5 th grades
Dawn	K	3	3	3	4	3	4	Special Education. After school remediation.
Joyce	K	4	4	4	4	4	4	Academically and Intellectually Gifted Program
Michael	1	3	2	3	2	3	3	Special Education
Aliah	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	Received Intervention in Reading
Jacqueline	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	Special Education
Caroline	1	3	3	4	3	3	3	
Ben	1	4	4	4	4	3	4	Special Education
Demetrius	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	Special Education. No elementary school achievement records were included in the cumulative folder.
Morgan	1	4	4	4	4	3	3	504 Plan.
Hilary	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	Participant did not attend elementary school in North Carolina.
Donna	2	3*	2*	3	2	1	2	Special Education. *These are grade equivalent scores for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which was taken while participant was in private school.
Al	3	3*	2*	3	2	-	3	Special Education. *These scores were retests. The first scores were both 2s.
Emily	3	4*	4*	4	3	4	3	These scores were from the second time in third

								grade. The first scores were 3 in Math, 2 in Reading. Report card showed all As and Bs.
Heather	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	Special Education.
Mandy	3	2	3*	3	2	5.2**	3.6**	Special Education. *This score is from the second time in third grade. The first was a 2. **These are California Achievement Test Grade Equivalent Scores.
Kelly	3	2*	3*	3	3	3	2	Special Education. *These scores were from the second time in third grade. The first time in third grade, she scored 1 in Math, 2 in Reading.
Anthony	4	3	3	3	1	3	2	Special Education.
Melissa	5	3	4	3	3	4	3	Special Education. Participant made Fs in math in 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th grades. She was provided reading interventions during school.
Jeff	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	Participant was enrolled in a parochial school in 3 rd and 4 th grades.

Appendix M: Middle and High School Academic Records

Participant	Grade Held Back	Math EOG 6 th	Reading EOG 6 th	Math EOG 7 th	Reading EOG 7 th	Math EOG 8 th	Reading EOG 8 th	ACT	GPA
Victor	K	3	3	3	3	4	3	19	3.59
William	K	3	3	4	3	3	4	15	
Myron	K	3	4					12	2.5
Dawn	K	3	3	3	4	3	4		
Joyce	K	4	4	4	4	4	4		
Michael	1	3	2	3	2	3	3		1.3
Aliah	1								1.7
Jacqueline	1	3	3	3	3	3	3		1.9
Caroline	1	3	3	4	3	3	3		3.74
Ben	1	4	4	4	4	3	4		
Demetrius	1								
Morgan	1	4	4	4	4	3	3		
Hilary	2								2.7
Donna	2	3	2	3	2	1	2		
Al	3	3	2	3	2		3		1.6
Emily	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	15	3.6
Heather	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	13	
Mandy	3	2	3	3	2	5.2	3.6	13	
Kelly	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	12	
Anthony	4	3	3	3	1	3	2	11	

Melissa	5	3	4	3	3	4	3		
Jeff	5							11	