EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH GRADE RETENTION

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Edie Thomas

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Abstract

Grade retention is an ineffective intervention that has a direct correlation with unfavorable affect on students. Yet, it remains a common practice throughout public schools in the United States. Despite the use of retention, the academic performance and behavioral characteristics of students have not improved. In addition, the retention of students with diverse backgrounds has increased as teachers’ belief demonstrated their lack of knowledge of current research. This paper will explore elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention. Two theoretical frameworks were used to help supporting the study. They were Social and Cultural Capital Theories.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study with six elementary teachers who taught grades kindergarten to third. Data collection was a sixty-minute interview, transcribed and in vivo coded. The findings of this paper concluded that grade retention is a preferred practice among elementary teachers. Despite the research stating grade retention is an ineffective practice and it has a negative impact on students, the data reveal that grade retention is acceptable among teachers. More is needed in the implementation of scientific research based intervention and a change in current educational policy and practice.

Keywords: constructivism, grade retention, interpretative phenomenological analysis, scientific research-based interventions, retained.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Betty Connor. Despite her limited formal education, she was aware of how unfair life could be and imparted to her eight children the value of learning, love, and self-worth to even the playing field. Also, to my children, Stacy Jamal, Ebony, DaiQuan and Divine, thank you for your support and love. You allowed me to complete this work and forgave me for times you did not have my full attention. In addition, my wonderful husband, Stacy Thomas, though it was my cross to bear; you like Simon came along to carry it and shared the weigh. You listened to my ideas and concerns. You would not let me quit but motivated me throughout the journey. Wherever my name is written in this thesis yours should be there as well for you have been there every step from the beginning.

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This journey has not been a smooth or straight road. There were hidden curves and various obstacles that made the road traveled challenging. Despite the challenges, the journey revealed inner strength, endurance, and perseverance; characteristics, I was surprised to possess. Also, an awareness and acknowledgment that this journey was not traveled alone.

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Chapter I – Introduction

Grade retention is the act of placing a student in the same grade for a second year, also known as repeating a grade (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Grade level promotion standards at the national, state, and district levels are in response to increasing pressures to improve school performance (Shepard, 1989; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). As a result, there is a renewed emphasis on grade retention as an educational solution for underachieving children (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). In addition, teachers are considered important factors in retention decisions, especially teachers in elementary schools (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). In fact, an elementary teacher holds back more students than at the upper levels (Shepard, 1989). Therefore, the research topic will explore elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention.

National standards were developed under the premise that all students will be held accountable for passing the assessment (Bishop, 1997). Passing this test signifies that students have met the content standards. Also, national standards and assessments were developed to prepare students for college and the workforce (Bishop, 1997). Yet, the framework of the standards is like a one-size-fits mold. It does not acknowledge students from racial and cultural backgrounds as well as low-income (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Echevarria & Powers, 2006). The results of students not passing this test are identified as part of the “achievement gap” which means that affluent, white peers out-perform these students academically (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Often, national standards require students to master the standards, and if the standards are not mastered, they will not be promoted and are often retained in school (Cohen, 1995).

Standards at the state level are believed to provide a road map to directing students to what they will learn in each grade and subject. The Department of Education in each state
develops standards for schools (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). These standards are the foundation for professional development, instruction delivered to students, and awareness of state standardized tests for teachers (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). The standards in many states have impacted the promotion of students by adopting mandatory retention standards (Briggs, 2013). Students in the third grade are held back if they are failing the state standard for reading (Briggs, 2013). It is not only a costly process; it does not take into consideration the social-emotional impact this may have on a student (Cohen, 1995).

At the district level, school boards are responding to the demands of promotion standards delivered through the Department of Education in their state (Bowman, 2005). State and local education organizations have been evolving standards-based education so students can exit high schools without lacking the skills and knowledge needed to be productive members of society (Bowman, 2005). Yet, graduation requirements are being adjusted to match the state standards. These adjustments are placing students at-risk of failing or repeating a grade (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). In addition, school districts must demonstrate that all students are making progress, as benchmarked by standardized scores. It is sad to say that school districts have not demonstrated academic growth with Special Education, English language learners, racial background, and low-income students, despite the reform of the standards (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Research has shown that there are a large number of these students represented in the practice of retention (Cohen, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Echevarria & Powers, 2006).

Teachers play a major role in grade retention. Owings and Kaplan (2001) stated that the “increased political pressure on schools to demonstrate student achievement has pushed more and more educators to retain failing students to implement stricter promotion standards” (Owings & Kaplan, 2001, p. 9). Recently, teacher evaluations are linked to students' success, causing
teachers to retention a struggling student instead of allowing his or her poor score to be reflected in their evaluation (Gallagher, 2004). On the other hand, there are other factors that impact students’ achievement, such as the involvement of another teacher, support received outside of school, dysfunctional family situation, and societal factors that might affect students’ achievement (Gallagher, 2004). Therefore, tying teacher evaluations to student success have not improved grade retention (Cohen, 1995; Gallagher, 2004).

**Statement of the Problem**

Grade retention has been a shared but controversial educational practice (Jackson, 1975). Approximately twenty percent of American students are retained each year, and thirty to fifty percent are held back at least once before reaching ninth grade (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005; Reschly & Christenson, 2013). The United States, students are retained mostly due to failure to pass grade-level academic competencies (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Therefore an area of concern is the research demonstrating that grade retention has not provided long-term success for students' academic, behavioral and socio-emotional performance (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Another concern is some students are more likely to be held back in the practice of grade retention than others. Grade retention has produced a disproportionate number of students who are African-American, Hispanic, and low-income in comparison to their White peers (Tanner & Galis, 1997). There is also the concern that there exists a contradiction between research findings and pedagogical practices. Teachers continuing to have students repeat the same grade conflicts with the research findings as to its effectiveness (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

This study will explore elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention. Many teachers have utilized retention because they may be unfamiliar with present research finding, or
they do not believe the findings of the research (Tanner & Galis, 1997; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). On the other hand, teachers may believe that retaining a student is a good pedagogical practice (Witmer, Hoffman & Nottis, 2004). In most cases, it is the only alternative intervention used when confronted with a student struggling academically (Shepard & Smith, 1987). Exploring teachers’ experiences will provide more clarity on the reasoning behind their thought process in holding students behind.

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study is to explore the experiences of teachers’ use of grade retention in an elementary school located in Connecticut. At this stage in the research, the definition for grade retention is a process in which a teacher does not promote a student to the next grade level but has the student repeat the same grade for two consecutive years (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Teachers are the ones who make the recommendation to move the student forward or to keep them behind. Therefore, it is vital to distinguish and comprehend their beliefs and knowledge about retention (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004).

Embedded in the literature is the justification for a study on teachers’ perception of grade retention (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008; Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Teachers’ attitudes toward retention are not based on research but based on peer influence, past practices, or administrative policy (Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). In utilizing the Teacher Retention Beliefs and Knowledge Questionnaire (TRBKQ, Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) revealed that teachers from all grade levels believed that retention was an acceptable practice. Completing the questions for this study were thirty-five, K-4 teachers from a rural school district in the northeastern United States. They deemed students' academic achievement was the most
significant factor in their retention decisions. The study continues to display that teachers believed they needed more knowledge about the retention research in order to make a sound decision. Despite several educational reforms and increased level of accountability, teachers’ perceptions were not reflective of the vast body of evidence indicating that retention is an ineffective means of improving struggling student performance (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). A meta-analysis conducted by Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) revealed that there were too many negative outcomes from grade retention. It has not improved students’ academic or behavioral performance. In addition, teachers supporting this practice were not aware that grade retention had yielded a disproportionate number of students with diverse backgrounds retained in the public schools (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Gleason, Kwok, and Hughes’s (2007) study emphasized the over-identified population of students from racial/cultural backgrounds, especially African- American males, in comparison to White students.

Despite the substantial research on the effects of retention on student outcomes, there are some deficiencies in the evidence. The research about why teachers endorse grade retention for students is still underdeveloped (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). The works of literature focus in on the impact that retention has on students. Teachers’ understanding of grade retention is in the juvenile stage (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Also, educational reform such as the Common Core has not been studied to report the effectiveness of improving student learning, which will result in the reduction of grade retention. The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). The development of these standards provided the opportunity for all students to complete high school with the necessary skills and knowledge to enter college, career, and life, despite where they live (Common Core, 2017). In addition, there is limited research in the area of implementation of evidence-based
interventions, which can be used to provide instructional as well as social, behavioral supports for students (Thompson & Allen, 2012). This practice has the potential to reduce retention so that it does not have to be the only answer for struggling students (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

This topic on teachers' experience with grade retention relates to many audiences. It will add to the literature as it enhances the scholarly research about the academic and behavioral performance of students and the connection to retention. Also, it will provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice of retention (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Teachers need to effectively speak to the specific needs of all students and begin systematically reviewing evidence-based interventions to facilitate the academic and socioeconomic development of these students (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). In addition, the topic of this paper will influence educational leaders and policy makers to review current practice in order to meet the needs of all students (Pollards, 1993), not leaving behind students from cultural, racial, and low-income backgrounds.

**Significance of the Study**

Grade retention is a common practice in schools today (Witmer, West, & Hughes, 2004). A study such as this will be valuable and significant as it examines teachers' experiences with grade retention. It will add to the literature on grade retention, exploring the various aspects of teachers' beliefs in this practice and note the connection with researchers' findings of retention not producing long-term academic success for many students (Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007). It will be significant to dig deeper into teachers' support of retaining a child and their views of it being an efficient method of obtaining academic success (Witmer, West, & Hughes, 2004). This research will provide a clear understanding of teachers' perception of the practice, which can potentially move in the direction of exploring more interventions to help the
academically struggling student. Another area that makes this study important is the connection between educational reform and high-stakes testing. Teachers are forced to entertain the notion of placing the student in the same grade for the upcoming school year. Many researchers believed that this trend of grade retention is the direct result of the federal government demanding no more social promotion and a higher level of accountability for the school district by requiring additional assessments due to educational reform (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009). Before high-stakes testing, which accompanies most educational reform, teacher recommendations were heavily used for holding a student back in the same grade (Murray et al., 2010). Today, schools base their decision partially on students' annual state assessment scores. Since it is only a snapshot of a child's performance on a single measure, the process has reversed back to teachers having autonomy to retain (Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007; Crothers, et al., 2010). Policymakers, as well as educators, could make a connection by establishing a historical background between retention and educational reform where high-stakes testing forced states to look towards retention. (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010). It is vital to point out that this study is not stating that educational reform in the only correlation to increasing levels of grade retention. Yet, it may play a role in the increased students' academic and behavioral performance and teachers' feeling it is the only choice to aid a student.

As teachers recommend retention, they need to be aware of the connection between grade retention and over-identification of different racial/ethnic groups in comparison to Caucasian students (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Discrepancies in the educational participation and attainment of racial/ethnic groups in the United States are well documented (Ross et al., 2012). School districts boast on the achievement of all students, yet, in comparison to Caucasians there
still exists an achievement gap in some racial/ethnic as well as socially economically 

disadvantaged students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The term, “achievement gap” refers to the "disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White students" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.465). School readiness disparities, tapered for Caucasian students between 1998 and 2010, but the growth was unequal among racial/ethnic groups, in particular African-American and Hispanic students (Reardon & Portilla, 2015). Meisels and Liaw's (1993) study painted a dim view of retention and gender, race, and socially economically disadvantaged. Research emphasized over-representation of students with a racial/ethnic background in this practice of retention (Thompson & Allen, 2012). In addition, Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (2003) shared a longitudinal study. These researchers followed students grades one through twelve "During high school, 67% of students retained between grades 1 and 7 dropped out of high school, while 24% of students never retained and 32% of students in a low-achieving promoted comparison group dropped out" (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007, p. 318). This study is significant not only because it will add to the body of knowledge, but also it will inform teacher beliefs about grade retention and may be used by current educators for professional development of teachers in assisting them in uncovering their own constructed beliefs.

**Positionality Statement**

As an African -American, female, elementary school principal in a district that prides itself on the inclusion of many racially/culturally diverse groups, I inherited a school that viewed retention as an intervention for failing students. Therefore, I witnessed the effects of grade retention on all students' performance, especially students who are African-American and Hispanic. Before being appointed the administrator for this school, I worked at a middle school
in the same school district as an assistant principal. Retention was not a new word in my vocabulary. On the secondary level, students had the option of attending summer school. At that level, retention was used as a threat to students, knowing that socially they did not want to be a year behind their peers, and they often endured the heat of the summer months to complete the courses they failed.

I have retained students based on a combination of factors, if not all: formal and informal assessments, report cards, attendance, non-response to differentiated instruction but mostly a failure displayed by a lack of growth in scientific research-based interventions. If the school screening and assessment data indicated that the student showed no or minimal growth with these interventions over an extended period, we as an Instructional Support Team would refer a student for Special Education testing. The decisions were never made lightly and often reaped success in identifying the students so they could receive the necessary resources that a regular education classroom could not provide. Besides, I was a teacher for a majority of my educational career. I taught Music, Reading and Special Education. Personally, it was unacceptable for a child to fail my class. At that time, I was not aware of the in-depth research against grade retention. But, it always felt like it was not good for students. The aspect of students not moving on with their peers bothered me. Also, the thought of a students' self-esteem being impacted by this practice seemed cruel. A majority of the retained children made the statement that "staying back made them feel sad, bad and upset. They viewed it as a punishment" (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004, p. 214). As a teacher, I wondered: how could an entire year go by without these students making growth. I utilized research-based interventions in each subject that I taught because it was important to address all students' needs.
I formerly supervised twenty-two classroom teachers: 23% are African-American and Hispanic. However, this was not true when I inherited this school. The staff was predominantly White with two African-American teachers and one Hispanic female teacher. It was important at that time to select qualified teachers who could relate to a diverse student body. As I began working with the staff, several alarms alerted me to a problem with retention at this school. The first alarm went off when I attended the Child Study Team meeting. I recognized several issues. A majority of the students on the caseload were retained at least once. Also, the students were mostly from a diverse background, and over 80% were boys. Sleeper's (1993) study stated that "white teachers did not acknowledge race differences, and instead, insisted on color-blind positions that focused on minorities' shortcomings or deficits" (Jupp & Slattery, 2006 p. 201). Sleeper's research developed the belief that teachers did not have a convincing framework for thinking about racial inequality" (Jupp & Slattery, 2006). I have to agree with this statement. Over a period, I observed that these students were not improving academically even after retention; also, many of these students displayed behavioral issues and were sent to my office too often.

The second alarm went off when I received in May a long list of students who would not move to the next grade level the following year. There were students from all grade levels. My question was simple, "Why do you want to retain this child?" Teachers did not have enough documentation, data, or proven interventions to make that determination. Therefore, I held back two students where the teacher provided sound data and reasoning. As for the other twelve, I promoted them and assigned additional support for them as well as the students retained in the upcoming year. This was not a popular decision among those teachers. As an African-American, female principal, I recall the statement made by Briscoe (2005) in her article. She speaks to
"privileged researcher having the capability to interpret the world of those who experience
oppression accurately. This disability results in a perception, interaction, interpretation, and
representation of the other that is at best incomplete and at worst subordinating” (Briscoe, 2005,
p. 26). I believed this statement defined my staff, which whole-heartedly were doing what they
thought was right for children, yet they did not quite analyze the impact retention would have on
students with a diverse background.

The third alarm that went off was the second-grade African-American boy with the
pseudonym Dante, who had repeated the first grade. Unfortunately, Dante was a frequent flyer
in my office at least once or twice a week. One day, we sat at my round table discussing the
problem at hand. Dante had stolen a little boy's glasses. The glasses were missing for several
days. The Language Arts Specialist discovered them when she saw Dante take the glasses out of
his pocket to look through them. She mentioned to the classroom teacher that Dante was
embarrassed to wear his glasses. The teacher was puzzled because Dante did not wear glasses.
This was the reason that he was in my office. After several minutes of tears and apologies,
Dante admitted that he stole the glasses because he wanted to be able to read better. This second
grader was aware that he was struggling academically and that all the other students in the
classroom were younger and smarter than he. During that year of 2010, I met "many Dantes."

I am passionate about this topic, which naturally can make me appear to be biased. In
reading Machi and McEvoy’s (2009) statement "personal attachment also carries bias and
opinion that can cause a researcher to jump to the conclusion rather than arrive at a conclusion
after methodical scholarly work" (p. 19) assisted me in understanding bias. I have implemented
many changes during the past few years that have addressed not using retention as an
intervention, but I want to make sure that I am making the best decisions for my students. Sad to
say in implementing changes about retention, I did not spend enough time on understanding teachers’ experiences. In my attempt to use evidence-based intervention, I never assessed my teachers on their beliefs. Therefore, it became more of me telling them what to do instead of them willingly embracing the process. Despite the fact that students made improvements, I regret not taking the time to assess teachers’ needs and understanding their experiences, which would have caused less anxiety among them.

**Research Questions**

Numerous deductions have arisen when looking at the effectiveness and harmfulness about grade retention from the various researchers (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Peterson & Hughes, 2011; Stone & Engel, 2007). This problem of practice addressed teachers’ experiences with grade retention. The following question clarified the focus of this qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and served the central research question of this study: What are the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention?

**Theoretical Frameworks**

This Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis employs two theoretical frameworks: Social and Cultural Capital Theories. The Social Capital Theory looked at the foundation of social life and dictated one’s position within the social order (Bourdieu, 1983). It will be effective in framing teachers’ perceptions on utilizing grade retention as well as examining retained students’ positions. This research will cross over to Cultural Capital Theory. Cultural Capital Theory refers to educational advance in the form of degrees and titles that signify cultural competence and authority (Bourdieu, 1983). The research displayed that a majority of students retained each year are Hispanic and African-Americans. This theoretical framework will assist with teachers’ ability to communicate with all students. Therefore, the purpose of this
study is to explore elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention using these theories as a framework. The next section will discuss the origin and historical trajectory of the two theories.

**Historical Trajectory of Social and Cultural Capital Theories.** Social Capital Theory traces as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Jackman & Miller, 1998). Its roots are found in economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science literature (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996). The expression Social Capital is credited to Lyda Judson Hanifan (1879), one of the earliest pioneers in the study of this theory (Tzanakis, 2013). In 1920, she debated that Social Capital signifies valuable assets of individuals, which forms a social unit (Tzanakis, 2013).

The evolution of this theory was gradual; yet, it gained more recognition with the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, and James Coleman. Putnam (1995a) perceived Social Capital as a set of parallel relations between people, which promoted collaboration for the mutual benefit of the community. Later, Coleman (1988) extended the definition to include vertical connections categorized by a tiered structure and unfair power dissemination. He believed that Social Capital had the capability to produce harmful effects on society as a whole. In addition, Social Capital Theory has recently been utilized in multitudes of current educational reform practices and policies (Bryk, 2010; Leana & Pil, 2006; Leana & Pil, 2009; Johnson, Lustick & Kim, 2011). This includes educational policies such as high-stakes testing and grade retention (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

The historical trajectory of Cultural Capital Theory began in the nineteenth century with the three theorists, Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci who were the leading researchers to believe that a ruling class dominated our society (Jackman & Ross, 1998). They supported the belief that the middle class has developed education, purposely keeping the working class from
participating in the system. In the early 1960s, Pierre Bourdieu with Jean-Claude Passeron continued analyzing cultural capital about education in their publications, 'Les Etudiants et Leurs Etudes' in 1964 and Les Heritiuers in 1964 (DiMaggio, 1982). These publications allowed Bourdieu to examine this theory at many levels. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bourdieu sought to use Cultural Capital Theory in a unique way that surpasses more initial concepts. He explored the connection between the organization and basic explanation (Jackman & Ross, 1998). This section served as a historical trajectory of the Social and Cultural Capital Theories. In the next paragraph, there will be a review of seminal authors and their application of the frameworks.

Seminal and Contemporary Authors. It is essential to consider the work of the seminal and contemporary writers on both the Social and Cultural Capital Theories in order to begin to frame teachers' experiences with grade retention. In examining Social Capital Theory, the perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam are frequently displayed in scholars' studies to speak to educational reform. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the background of these three perspectives briefly.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was a French sociologist. He was fascinated with the reasoning behind the dominant class retaining a prominent position in society (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's work stressed how social groups, especially the dominant classes, reproduce themselves under the claim that society promotes social mobility especially through education (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu believed that society could not be studied concerning economic classes and ideologies as he focused on the independent position of educational and cultural elements. As an alternative to studying societies regarding classes, he used the concept of field,
which is a system of social ranks arranged within society regarding power relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Tzanakis, 2013).

Another seminal author was James Coleman. He was an American sociologist who collaborated for a short period with Bourdieu on a book, entitled *Social Theory in a Changing Society* (1991). Their approaches were different; Coleman connected Social Capital with economics. He outlined two distinctive intellectual streams in the description and explanation of social action (Coleman, 1988). The sociological approach was first in which he saw “the individual in a social and cultural environment, subject to norms, rules, and obligations” (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). The other was the economic approach about self-centered, independent persons looking to fulfill their goals (Coleman, 1988). Coleman’s approach led to a comprehensive and broader interpretation of Social Capital. It did not refer only to elites holding power but recognized its importance for all communities.

Building on a firm foundation constructed by the theories of Bourdieu and Coleman was Robert Putnam. A professor at Harvard University, Putnam was perceived as the famous, public figure of Social Capital Theory (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Putnam (2001) defined social funds as "the connections among individuals' social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). According to Putnam, Social Capital is a fundamental component of building and upholding democracy. Putnam believes that Social Capital is deteriorating in the United States, such as a lack of trust in government and civic participation. Social Capital measures trust and reciprocity found in a community or between individuals. There are two central components of the Social Capital Theory: one is bonding Social Capital, and the other is bridging Social Capital (Putnam, 2001). In Putnam’s research,
he defines bonding as the value given to social networks between the same groups and bridging as the social networks between socially mixed groups (Putnam, 2001).

The following researchers examined school reform and the need to renew or change educational policies and leaned strongly on the research of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. One example was Pil and Leana’s (2009) study that sampled 1,013 teachers organized in 239-grade teams to determine the effects that teacher Social Capital has on growth in student performance. The finding confirmed that teacher Social Capital improved student performance. Also, utilizing the perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam was Adler & Kwon (2002). Their study synthesized the theoretical research and developed a common conceptual framework that identifies the sources, benefits, risks, and contingencies of Social Capital. Yosso (2005) employed Bourdieu’s work on Cultural and Social Capital Theory. Under the lens of the critical race theory, she employed education policy to create schools that recognize the “multiple strengths of Communities of Color” in order to provide all students the same opportunity (p. 72).

It is evident that Pierre Bourdieu’s Social Capital Theory incorporated financial resources associated with a network of social relationships (Portes, 1998). On the other hand, his theory of Cultural Capital incorporated nonfinancial resources that allowed social mobility. Many of the same seminal writers that utilized the theory of Social Capital can be seem using Cultural Capital as well (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Dumais, 2002; Emirbayer, M., & Williams, E. M., 2005; Yosso, 2005). Pierre Bourdieu was the chief developer and a seminal writer of this concept (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

The concept of Cultural Capital has received worldwide attention. Yet, it is mostly employed in relation to the education system (Shirley, 1986; Lipman, 2002; Yosso, 2005). An
example would be Emirbayer and Williams (2005) who used this theory to study the power relations in the field of social services, mostly homeless shelters. Other seminal writers are Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995). They completed an examination of people with the preferred types of Cultural Capital in a school transformation advancing their success in the school. Dumais (2002) introduced a study that was similar to Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch, 1995). He utilized gender to determine the ability of Cultural Capital to increase educational success. Paul DiMaggio (1982) developed the theory of Cultural Capital as he measured high school students' Cultural Capital utilizing self-reports of involvement in art, music, and literature. These paragraphs displayed seminal writers for the two theories. Next, this research will frame the problem of practice using the Social and Cultural Theories.

**Framing the Problem of Practice Using Social and Cultural Capital Theory**

Educational organizations utilize Social and Cultural Capital Theory as a solution to persistent social problems in education, which include grade retention (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Dika & Singh, 2002). The research question for this qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis will be: What are the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention?

**Social Capital Theory.** Utilizing the structural aspect of internal Social Capital will be demonstrated in this study. Teachers’ attitudes toward grade retention are not based on research but rather, between colleagues (Leana & Pil, 2006). Researchers’ findings showed that there are two types of Social Capital: internal and external. They are important factors of student achievement test scores in both reading and math and are also important predictors of instructional quality (Penuel, Krause & Frank, 2009). The focus to frame this problem in practice will be the internal, Social Capital. The structural aspect of Social Capital refers to the connections among teachers and the frequency they share information (Penuel, Krause & Frank,
Grade retention has been used as an intervention for several years; investigating internal Social Capital will assist with understanding the practice of grade retention among teachers.

Bourdieu’s (1986) theory built upon the central idea of social networks having values (Bourdieu, 1986). This is another component that can be used to frame this practice of grade retention. It is important to examine experiences from teachers' points of view, to understand what they value, and to dig deeper into their experiences why they select grade retention. Researchers have found that studying teacher networks aids in creating a clearer understanding of the internal structure of school community (Fox & Wilson, 2015). Since teachers select retention over most interventions, it is vital to determine what they value about retention (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). Therefore, exploring teachers' social networks will produce measurable data that can clarify teachers' attitudes and behaviors about grade retention. Scholars believed that norms and beliefs held by teachers could support or hinder efforts to improve teaching and learning in schools (Fox & Wilson, 2015; Penuel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). However, teachers are often unaware of how they make decisions because of the inherent nature of the beliefs upon which they base their judgments (Penuel, Krause & Frank, 2009). The bases on which teachers make retention judgments are not described in the literature. Therefore, this study will build upon the current research.

It is essential to add Social Capital Theory's component of teacher networks to explore educational reform and teacher involvement. The pressure was placed on educators and school districts to obtain proficiency in math, reading, and writing (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Each of these educational reforms has placed more demands and a higher level of accountability on teachers in school districts to improve students' scores. Despite several educational reforms and the increased level of responsibility upon teaching staff, this
practice has not closed the achievement gap (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Sad to say, teachers do not have a voice in creating educational policies. By using Social Capital teacher network examinations will assist to evaluate and make a recommendation about policies that should be aimed at providing effective academic instruction for all students, especially students who have been retained. Differences in student academic "success can be attributed to different levels of existing Social Capital, which is produced by the networks, and connections to families that the school serves," (Granovetter, 1983). Teachers’ network data can provide useful information to policymakers as well as school officials about the achievement of initiatives planned to advance better collaboration in schools.

A larger number of students from diverse backgrounds are retained, and this framework will help each teacher construct their reality about what they believe about grade retention and how those beliefs may impact certain populations of students more than others (Yosso, 2005). Many studies have found that males are twice as likely to be held back in the same grade as females. Also, the consistent findings indicate that retention rates are higher for minority students (particularly African-Americans and Hispanic students). In addition, retained students also are likely to have missed a greater percentage of school days than non-retained students (Jimerson, 2001). Thus, research goes contrary to the traditional teachers' belief that retaining students gives them a chance to lay a foundation for future academic success, thereby increasing their chances of staying in school (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). Conflicting evidence suggests that public demands for stricter promotion standards may increase the already alarmingly high dropout rates, particularly among low-ability, minority, and low socioeconomic status populations (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1987). The theoretical framework can be beneficial in
investigating teachers' understanding of the consequences of retention due to the number of students from a diverse background who are being held back in comparison to their White peers.

Through the practice of teacher network development, students in schools will establish the social relationships with a teacher (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001). The connection motivates students to engage in institutional resources of the school (Coleman, 1988; Supovitz & Christman, 2005). In other words, the process of teacher network development encourages students to be involved with program activities and services (Pil & Leana, 2009). In any school district in the United States, it is normal to find students of particular teachers always outperforming their peers on different measures, especially standardized assessments (Bryk, 2010). Researchers have completed an examination of the individual instructional practices used by these teachers in an effort to justify or comprehend this phenomenon (Pil & Leana, 2009). However, recent studies have been looking outside the practices of individual teachers, and considering the “collaborative practices of teachers instead, suggesting that social practices have as strong an impact on teacher and student learning as individual practices” (Johnson, Lustick & Kim, 2011, p. 13). Therefore, the Social Capital Theory could be used to argue that it is not just individual teachers' skills that set them apart as good teachers but their connections to and interactions with other teachers, especially students (Penuel, Krause & Frank, 2009).

**Cultural Capital Theory.** Cultural Capital is the accumulation of knowledge, behaviors, and abilities that demonstrate cultural proficiency and social status in society (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) writings, it stated that this accumulation reinforced class differences (DiMaggio, 1982). The Cultural Capital like Social Capital, clearly displays several variables such as race, class, gender, and age to mention a few that hold access to differing sources and forms of knowledge. In addition, it will assist in framing teachers’
experiences with grade retention, for students who sit before them are of various races, genders, and financial status. To gain a clearer understanding of this concept, it important to refer to Bourdieu’s alignment of the three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states (Bourdieu, 1983).

Cultural Capital exists in an embodied state. In Bourdieu’s (1983) words, the knowledge accumulated through the process of socialization and education lives within an individual. He continues to explain that individuals desire various forms of embodied Cultural Capital; it is innate, so they seek to acquire more. Bourdieu emphasized that individuals’ display embodied Cultural Capital each day as they travel throughout the world interacting with others. The objectified state exists in the Cultural Capital as described by Bourdieu (1983). It makes a connection to the material objects that an individual possesses such as educational pursuit, jobs, clothing, or style in furniture. These objectified forms show others how much Cultural Capital an individual owns as it indiscreetly defines economic classes. The institutionalized state is the final state listed within Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital. Institutionalized state demonstrates how Cultural Capital is gauged, certified, and ranked. Academic credentials and degrees are leading samples of this, as well as job and religious titles or political offices. Bourdieu (1983) stated that Cultural Capital is used to facilitate and apply social boundaries, hierarchies, and inequality. Though the three states can be interchangeable, the next paragraphs will facilitate the framing of exploring teachers’ experience with grade retention within the institutionalized state.

Using the institutionalized state that exists in the Cultural Capital will afford the study the opportunity to frame teachers’ experience with grade retention, especially when exploring the disproportionate number of students who have been retained who are African-American and Hispanic. According to Bourdieu, schools reward students by their Cultural Capital (Bourdieu,
Researchers believe that teachers form better relationships with students identified in elite status cultures. In return, teachers provide more assistance or special treatment with the perception that the elite status cultures are more intelligent or gifted than students who do not possess Cultural Capital (Lipman, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Mills, 2008). As discussed earlier in the research, teachers play a significant role in retaining a student (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). To dig deeper, if schools are a mirror of society, then racial bias reflects what is entrenched in our society (Ravitch, 2010). In addition, all students are measured alongside culturally biased standards supporting White, middle-class students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, aligning students to White middle-class values gauge success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Sad to say, if a student does not have these values, they are at a huge disadvantage (Schutz, 2006). Teachers' decisions to retain students may be inadvertently impacted by the Cultural Capital of these students (Schnurr, Kundert & Nickerson, 2009). Utilizing the Cultural Capital Theory will provide a strong framework for this research as it explores teachers’ experiences with grade retention.

**Synthesis of Social and Cultural Theories.** A theoretical lens increases the rigor of a study. Specifically, employing theory more readily links the findings of a problem of practice to other disciplines for readers (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). This study will blend Social and Cultural Theories in order to frame teachers' knowledge of current research, the demands placed on the teacher with the various educational reforms, and teachers holding back a vast number of students from diverse populations more frequently than their White peers. It will explore teachers' interactions, teacher social networks, and internal social theory as well as teachers’ view of students with limited Cultural Capital. Also, the framework presented may provide
additional information missing from the literature, which is teachers' beliefs and values as they relate to selecting retention as an intervention for academically struggling students.

**Conclusion/Forward**

This chapter discussed the following areas: statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, positionality statement, central research question, and theoretical framework. Chapter 2 will examine the literature pertaining to teachers' experience with grade retention. It will explore a brief history of educational reform, the effect of grade retention on students' academic and behavioral performance in school, the rationale behind retaining a student, overrepresentation of students with diverse background as being retained more than White peers, and the role teachers play in grade retention. Chapter 3 will investigate the method utilized in the dissertation to examine teachers' experiences with grade retention. Chapter 4 will report the research findings of this study. Chapter 5 will discuss the research findings as well as the implications for future practice.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

The Social and Cultural Capital Theories, along with the research question, scaffolds the investigation of the literature relevant to this study. The central question is: What are the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention?

This research aimed to examine, interpret, and understand teachers-participants’ perspectives on their experiences. This study also intertwined the feelings and effect that accompanied their views on grade retention. Therefore, the theories and the central question provided the path that guided the interrogation of the literature.

An appropriate and concise starting point for the review of literature begins with the examination of a historical link between grade retention and educational reform. Grade retention has increased over the past ten years due to promotion standards (Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009; Murray, Woodruff & Vaughn, 2010). After reviewing the substantial body of research in this area, it is essential to inspect the academic performance and behavioral characteristics of retained students. This will assist in determining the positive or negative effects this practice may have on students’ growth (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Alexander, Entwisle ,& Dauber, 2003; Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Also, it is important to examine students from racial/cultural and low-income backgrounds and the fact that these students are held back more frequently than their White peers (Meisels & Liaw, 1993; Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersley, 2010). This literature review, acknowledges that teachers play a significant role in the retention of a child. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate teachers’ decisions to retain students as well their perception of grade retention (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004; Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2010). In addition, the study of literature will review the usage and
implementation of scientific research-based interventions as another intervention than grade retention (Bowman, 2005; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

**Historical Background Between Grade Retention and Educational Reform**

A study of the historical timeline of various educational reforms and policies will provide a connection between retention and educational reform. Grade retention in the United States has been utilized in the educational system for over 100 years (Peterson & Hughes, 2011). Since the beginning of age-based classrooms in the nineteenth century, grade retention has been an accepted and implemented educational practice (Ehmke, Dreschel, & Carstensen, 2010). Evidenced by the fact that nearly twenty percent of the students in the United States have been retained at least once (Reschly & Christenson, 2013), many stakeholders view grade retention as a positive academic intervention. Proponents contend that grade retention provides an additional opportunity for students to relearn curriculum and become academically equivalent to their grade-level peers (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004).

There was a paradigm shift during the mid-1960s. Educators and administrators began to acknowledge the harmful effects of grade retention. Historically, grade retention has negatively impacted students by decreasing their educational motivation, lowering their self-esteem, and limiting their learning opportunities (Ehmke, Dreschel, & Carstensen, 2010). The practice of grade retention places educators in a dilemma because often there are few viable options available to meet the educational needs of students. Because of this dilemma, educational researchers and administrators, in the 1960s, began to utilize social promotion (Bowman, 2005; Eide & Goldhaber, 2005; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009). In the 1980s, grade retention was implemented and was the direct result of the federal government demanding no more social promotion (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004; Jimerson, 2001;
A higher level of accountability for the school district was required, and additional assessments were introduced due to educational reform (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008; Bowman, 2005; Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009). The implementation of various educational reforms has an impact on the increased levels of retention in schools as they have influenced promotion standards (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). The next section will review various educational reforms that impacted grade retention.

The promises of educational reform for the public schools have been the foundation of many campaigns. Under President Reagan was the National Committee on Excellence in Education (1983) and the creation of the A Nation at Risk. The committee reported that the students in the United States were not performing as well as their counterparts in other countries (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Thompson & Allen, 2012). Waves of improvement efforts radiated from this landmark indictment of United States public schools (Jackson, 1975). One example is the High Schools That Works Reforms in 1987 (Stone & Engel, 2007; Thompson & Allen, 2012). This reform initiative was to improve high schools in more than 30 states by developing new standards for the current curriculum, creating instructional goals, implementing academic/vocational integration, utilizing guidance counseling, improving teacher practices, and enhancing work-based learning. Unfortunately, the revisions trickled down forcing higher promotion standards that impacted all grade levels by having students repeat the same grade (Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

Another reform was the 1993s Success For All. This program focus was on disadvantaged students in grades pre-K through five. As a school-based program, Success For All goals were to prevent or intervene in the growth of learning difficulties in the early years (Norton, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012; Tingle, Schoeneberger, & Algozzine, 2012). The
initiative was to provide instructional and family support resources within the regular classroom. This program was to ensure that almost every student in a high-poverty school would have reading skills to complete the third grade. If students did not make this expected performance level, they were retained in grade three in order to provide more interventions (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993).

Under President Clinton’s administration, the Comprehensive School Reform of 1997 was another educational reform that was created to improve the education of low-income students by allowing Title I monies to be utilized mainly for disadvantaged students in order to encourage school-wide improvement (Reason, 2009; Thompson & Allen, 2012). The belief was that a challenging curriculum program was not the only component critical to improving student achievement levels; rather, efficient school management, ongoing staff development, periodic student assessment, and parent involvement were also key (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009; Thompson & Allen, 2012). The strategies of this reform movement are wide-ranging and encompassed all aspects of a school's operations. All of the states had to create new policies to address social promotion due to demands that President Clinton placed on each state during his 2000 State of the Union address denouncing social promotion (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick; 2007). This ignited the practice of retention to a new height (Jimerson, 2001; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). The United States legislation intensified standards and raised the level of accountability among schools (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004). The burden fell upon teachers to demonstrate students' mastery of skills or have students repeat (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick; 2007).

The Bush Administration developed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (PL. 107-110), which was another attempt at educational reform (Stone & Engel, 2007). This new
mandate replaced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick; 2007). NCLB required all states to develop clear and challenging standards for each grade curriculum and measure each student's performance on the standards (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). NCLB has failed because many children were left behind due to retention (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007). The pressure was placed on educators and school districts to obtain proficiency in Math, Reading, and Writing. The Florida Association of School Psychologists, (2004) reported over 192,713 students repeated kindergarten through third grade, costing over one billion dollars (Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nickerson, & Kundert, 2006).

Another attempt at educational reform was Race to the Top (RTTT) introduced through the Obama Administration. The two goals of RTTT is "creating political cover for state education reformers to innovate and helping states construct the administrative capacity to implement these innovations effectively" (McGuinn, 2012, p.139). The program hard-pressed states to promote significant policy changes around teacher-evaluation processes as well as charter schools (McGuinn, 2012). Though the program’s process or methods differed from the earlier attempts at reform, similar political and institutional problems remained the same (McGuinn, 2012). Therefore, it received short-term effects, not enjoying the long-term effects that were planned (McGuinn, 2012).

The most recent attempt at educational reform is Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The focus is on the skills in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-12 in order to “ensure that students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful” (CCSS, 2010, p.1). Currently, 43 states have adopted and are in the process of fully implementing the standards (CCSS, 2010). The CCSS promotes a national curriculum, gives the federal
government complete control of educational decisions, and directly impacts all children residing in the states that have fully or partially adopted the standards (Krashen, 2014). The standards determine learning expectations for all students; however, assessment and data collection methods are solely determined by states (CCSS, 2010). Researchers (Dworkin, 2005; Haney, 2000; Lipman, 2002) indicated that accountability systems have increased grade level retention and dropout rates for low income, minority students. Haney (2000) specified that standardized testing is linked to the retention of at-risk students after grade level testing, and this practice is of special concern because students who have been retained are more likely to drop out of school.

Each of these educational reforms has placed more demands and a higher level of accountability on school districts to improve students’ scores (Reason, 2009; McGuinn, 2012; Thompson & Allen, 2012). The attempt to improve students’ learning has re-ignited the grade retention policies, placing teachers in the position of making this decision. The above paragraphs presented an examination of the historical trajectory of various educational reforms and provided a connection between retention and educational reform. This literature will continue with exploring additional reasons why a student repeats a grade.

**Academic Performance of Retained Students**

At this point, it is imperative to examine the academic performance of retained students at various grade levels. Students of all grades can be retained; yet, children generally in the primary grades are often retained more frequently (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Norton, 2011; Range, Pijanowski, Holt, & Young, 2012). These are students in kindergarten through third grade. This reiterates that grade retention often occurs in the primary grades (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). In the practice of grade retention, elementary school teachers often witness an increase in students’ test scores and academic performance in the year directly following
retention (Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankerslay, 2010). Yet, it is highly improbable that the gains will have a long-term effect after students leave elementary school (Shepard & Smith 1990). Though the results demonstrate short-term positive effects, in the long term the students repeating the grade are at a greater risk of failure or dropping out of school (Shepard & Smith 1990; Thompson & Allen, 2012). The preliminary positive effect could form teachers’ beliefs that retention is a helpful and needed intervention strategy for amending academic failure. Unfortunately, this was a short-term effect. The retainees’ academic performances declined as they performed lower than their promoted peers (Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007). This placed them back where they started, below their peers. Therefore, the framework of the research examining the effects of grade retention on the academic achievement or performance during the primary years demonstrated that this gauge does not have the expected outcome as desired. The retention did not produce long-term academic success for students in the primary grades.

This study’s central question focuses on the elementary teachers’ perception on grade retention. Due to retention at the elementary level, it is essential to examine students’ progress at the secondary level to determine the impact of grade retention on their academic performance on a fuller scale. In an earlier report by Jimerson and colleagues (1997), they presented the outcomes of the longitudinal study, which looked at the academic performance and behavioral outcomes of early grade retention through high school. The comparison of a group of children who were retained showed similar stages of early achievement with similar scores on two measures of intelligence. The retained students demonstrated early gains. Despite the fact that there were similar gains on the elementary level as the students progressed throughout school, the research found that elementary school into high school students fell behind academically and
displayed poorer emotional problems by the sixth grade. By the age of sixteen, they continued to decline academically and dropped out of school (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, (2003) shared a longitudinal study. These researchers followed students grade one through high school. “During high school, 67% of students retained between grades 1 and 7 dropped out of high school, while 24% of students never retained and 32% of students in a low-achieving promoted comparison group dropped out” (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007, pp. 318). They concluded that some retained students during elementary school benefited from retention. At the middle school level, they are most likely to be referred to remedial classes as well as at the high school level (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Students retained during elementary school were at-risk for dropping out without a high school diploma.

Many researchers used Holmes and Matthews’ (1984) meta-analysis in their studies. They compiled data from the literature on retention. After identifying which articles met the selection process, they scientifically mixed them to determine the effects of grade-level retention on elementary and junior high school pupils.

Holmes & Matthew’s (1984) study found the following:

high degree of consistency in these measures lends credibility to the validity of these findings. In addition to the grand means, effects sizes were calculated for various dependent variable measures, including academic achievement (further subdivided into various areas), personal adjustment (which included self-concept, social adjustment, and emotional adjustment), and attitude toward school, behavior, and attendance. In all cases, the outcomes for promoted pupils were more positive than for retained pupils. (p. 225)
Retention has not improved students’ academic performance. The previous paragraphs summarized the literature on the academic performance of students retained at the primary and secondary grades. The intention of grade retention is to resolve the problem of students' poor academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 1989). Yet, it does not address the research indicating that grade retention affects on student self-image, social and emotional development, attitudes regarding school, in addition to academic achievement (Holmes & Mathews, 1984, Jackson, 1975; Smith & Shepard, 1987). Therefore, this review will continue with exploring how grade retention impacts students’ behavioral performance in school.

**Behavioral Characteristics of Retained Students**

It is crucial to review the role that retention has played on the behavioral characteristics of students during school. There have been numerous studies investigating children’s behavioral performance after being retained (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). The bulk of these studies, which were well over seven hundred analyses of achievement and behavior, displayed undesirable effects on behavioral performance when the retained children move to the next grade level (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Crothers et al., (2010) stated that students who are most likely to become bullies or victims are connected to grade level retention in their study. Students retained experience peer difficulties due to behavioral problems (Crothers et al., 2010).

Leckrone and Griffith’s (2006), research indicated that students repeating a grade feel bored in school. They continued by stating that students are discouraged, and the threat of them not graduating from high school does not motivate them to participate in school. These students reported, “feeling alienated in the school environments” (p. 54). Furthermore, even if there were
academic gains made with retained students, behaviors are not maintained as they progress through the next grade level.

On the other side, the four-year longitudinal study by Wu, West, and Hughes (2010) investigated the retention of children in grades one and two. They looked at "externalizing and internalizing behaviors; social acceptance; and behavioral, cognitive, and effective engagement" (p.135). Their finding stated that retention had a positive short-term effect on children's perception of being a part of the school and a positive longer-term effect on perceived academic growth. Though retention on a short-term basis can be effective, the researcher stated that the longer-term effect could be harmful on the social interaction of students, which will be a longer-term negative effect of retention (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2010). Furthermore, the consequences of grade-level retention include increased behavioral difficulties, lower self-esteem, and poor relationships with their peers (Gottfried, 2013; Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nickerson, & Kundert, 2006).

In a longitudinal study of the outcomes of grade retention, Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) discovered that children retained demonstrate more physical aggression and had difficulties communicating, which is harmful towards another students or teachers during adolescence than do low-achieving, promoted students. "The long-term effect of retention includes lower levels of academic adjustment, a greater propensity to drop out of high school, and a variety of poorer employment outcomes" (Crothers et al. 2010, p. 328). In addition, it is important to explore students’ perspectives regarding retention that may impact their social interactions. Researchers Yamamoto and Byrnes (1987) asked children to rate twenty stressful life events (Jimerson et al., 2006). The children listed events such as: losing a parent, going to the dentist, and receiving a poor report card. The results among sixth-grade students listed grade retention third on the list of
more stressful events, following the loss of a guardian or parent and losing eyesight (Jimerson et al., 2006). Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2005) duplicated and extended this research and found that students rated repeating a grade as the most stressful life event, similar to the loss of a parent and going blind (Jimerson et al., 2006). Both studies demonstrated an evolving trend, consistent with emerging social and cognitive skills, with the reported stress of grade retention students. These findings have clear implications in considering the potential socio-emotional and psychological impact on children when exploring possible interventions to address academic or behavioral problems (Jimerson et al., 2006). The finding on grade retention is not supported as an early intervention to increase the socio-emotional or behavioral adjustment of children. This discussion highlighted the effects of retention on the behavioral performance of students.

**The Retention of Students From Racial, Cultural and Low-Income Backgrounds**

The literature points out there are significant numbers of students from diverse backgrounds in this practice of grade retention (Iruka, Burchinal, & Cai, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). In addition, students from low-income families are held back in the same grade as well. Therefore, it is critical to investigate the literature. There are many concerns about grade retention because of the implication that students from diverse backgrounds are being retained more often than their White peers (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersley’s (2010) research displayed that students who are a minority, male, or from groups of low socioeconomic status are retained more often than their peers who are White, female.

According to Griffith et al., (2010), current national data pointed out that 16% of African Americans compared to 8% of Caucasians are retained. Also, more than 13% males compared to 6%, females repeat a grade. In addition, 6.9% of the students who are social-
economically disadvantaged compared to 3.9% of students from households doing well financially have been retained (p. 58).

Other researchers have examined the contrast of students with diversity as well. Meisels and Liaw’s (1993) study reported that out of 16,623 students in kindergarten through eighth grades, 19.3% repeated the same grade at least once. However, students who are African American and Hispanic had a higher representation than White students. There were 25.2% African Americans, and 25% Hispanic students compared with 17.2% of White students. Also, boys at 24% outnumbered the girls at 15.3% and 33.9% of social economically disadvantaged which includes students from the stated minority groups in compared to 8.6% of White students were retained more frequently (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). This study paints a dim view of retention and gender, race, and socially economically disadvantaged. It is evident that students from racial/cultural backgrounds dominate the numbers of retainees.

Retained students, but especially males, are least likely to be successful in school. Thompson and Allen’s (2012) research indicated that by the time African-American and Hispanic males enter school they are flawed by situational variables. These variables are harsher discipline practices, being taught by inexperienced teachers, being referred to special education, and feeling detached from school. This study consequently stated that these variables forced male students to drop out of school, and fifty percent of the dropouts would become incarcerated at least once before the age of thirty (Thompson & Allen, 2012). Retainees leaving school without graduating set on a course towards incarceration. Moreover, the imprisonment of students of color who are males in juvenile detention reflects their experiences with school discipline (Stone & Engel, 2007).
The achievement gap is another problem in education that Ladson-Billings (2006) addresses in her article. The achievement gap displays the discrepancies in standardized test scores between African-Americans and Whites, Hispanics and White, and recent immigrants and White students. She argues that the gap should not be the focus. Instead, it should be “education debt” that has accrued for a long time. The debt covers “historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components” (p. 7). She continues by explaining that the gap can be displayed not only in standardized test scores, but it also exists when we examine dropout rates or grade retention numbers. These students are less likely to “take advanced placement examinations; enroll in honors, advanced placement, and ‘gifted’ classes; and less likely to be admitted to colleges and graduate and professional programs” (p. 8).

It is important to note that students from low-income backgrounds were retained two to three times more often than their peers from higher-income backgrounds (Jimerson et al., 2006). Notably, while retention rates were excessively high for children living in urban or inner-city districts, they were even more pronounced between students from families with low incomes who attended predominantly middle-class schools (Stone & Engel, 2007). A thorough investigation of the grade retention of students with diverse backgrounds was conducted in the previous paragraphs. The literature emphasized over-representation of these students who are retained.

**Reasons Teachers Retain Students**

There are several reasons a student repeats a grade level. Students must master academic skills in English Language Arts and Mathematics (Lynch, 2013). Advocates for retention believe that students not meeting grade-level standards will continue to fall behind, especially as they move through the grades (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). The concept of an extra year will
help the student catch up. This is one factor for retaining a student struggling academically. There are additional reasons a school may have a student repeat a grade. A child’s birthday falls later in the school year. Often, students who are late October to the end of December are considered to be retained, especially if the student displays to socially immature (Mantzicopoulos, 1997). Another factor is a student has been absent due to a serious sickness (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). The student has missed skills needed to move ahead and be successful in the next grade. It is important to note that some states have third-grade retention laws which hold students back in grade three who are not reading at a pre-determined level (Range, Pijanowski, Holt, & Young, 2012). This is a crucial point in the literature to understand teachers’ beliefs on grade retention.

There has been substantial research on the effects of retention on student outcomes. Yet, research about why teachers endorse grade retention for students is underdeveloped. This research area is important to understand because, “retention is typically viewed as a school-level decision made by principals and teachers” (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004, p. 174). The role of a teacher is vital in the practice of retention. She or he can deconstruct and reverse the destructive path of retention. An examination of teachers’ beliefs about grade retention is a vital area to review.

Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis’ (2004) research utilized thirty-five elementary teachers representing grades K-4. These teachers were from a rural school district in the northeastern United States. The results of the administered questionnaire demonstrated that teachers from each of the grade levels thought retention was an acceptable practice based on academic performance.
Similar findings were revealed in Hossler, Ziskin, and Gross’ (2009) study. After seventy-four teachers from three different elementary schools in urban Southeastern Massachusetts had completed a questionnaire, the findings demonstrated that teachers believed a majority of students should be retained due to poor grades resulting into poor academic standing. They firmly believed that retaining a student is often based on the expectations that all children will be successful in the grade-level curriculum (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). Grade retention will be the gift of extra time in the same grade level. It is apparent that failure to grasp academic skills on grade-level is the shared reason for retaining a student; yet, there are incidents where students are kept back for non-academic reasons. An example of this could be a kindergartener being held back for behavioral reasons. Peterson and Hughes’, (2011) research stated that a child who is too immature could not manage the expected social and behavioral demands of older grades and might need more time to develop. Immature students are students who struggle because they are not fully developed physically, and they do not display emotional or intellectual development in comparison to children their age (Peterson & Hughes, 2011). Elementary teachers support the retention of children based on immaturity (Tomchin & Impara, 1992).

They believed that retention was not harmful in grades K–3. Teachers disagreed about the impact on students in grades 4–7. They were less likely to retain in grade 4-7 feeling it was too late to accomplish foundational skills met in the primary grades (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). Close examinations or past practice have found teachers’ beliefs about retention are influenced more by peers rather than by research (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). In turn, teachers recommend students for retention who are boys, racially/culturally diverse, and of low socioeconomic status. Sad to say, retention is not effective in producing significant gains in students’ achievement or guaranteeing a gift of maturity for repeating a year (Thompson & Allen,
An examination of the teachers’ belief and their knowledge on current retention research toward retained students was discussed. Many studies have demonstrated that grade retention is not the only intervention for struggling students (Rodney, Crafter, Rodney, & Mupier, 1999; Stone, & Engel, 2007; Reason, 2009). This literature review will continue with alternatives to grade retentions.

**Alternative to Retention as an Intervention**

There is no one, intervention solution that will effectively speak to the specific needs of all students and serve as an alternative to retention. Yet, the process can begin by having a systematic and evidence-based interventions to facilitate the academic and socioeconomic development of these students (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). The following strategies are examples of evidence-based alternatives to grade retention and serve as the implication for future research.

Promoting parent involvement is an intervention that is effective. Through frequent communication with teachers, supervision of homework, and involvement in school activities, a parent can support and promote learning (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). In addition, it can make students and parents feel like a part of the school environment.

Another intervention can be tutoring programs and enrichment strategies, which can be helpful tools in improving the skills of students. Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) believed systematic assessment strategies such as continual progress monitoring and formative evaluation would promote ongoing modification of instructional efforts. In addition, it is important to include alongside this, effective programs that regularly evaluate student progress and adapt instructional strategies to the outcomes of these assessments (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).
Research indicated that students who are not able to read by the third grade face significant academic hurdles and an increased risk of retention and dropping out of school (Bowman, 2005). Therefore, reading intervention programs should provide developmentally appropriate, rigorous, and direct instruction strategies to promote the reading skills of struggling students (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). This practice would be beneficial as evidence–based intervention. Also, it would assist the students in improving their reading skills and reducing grade retention.

Evidence-based interventions for the behavioral concerns are school-based mental health programs. These programs can promote the social and emotional adjustment of children. Research indicated that addressing behavior problems has been found to be effective in facilitating academic performance (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). In addition to this, support teams for students with certified teachers to monitor and recommend targeted learning goals or behavior plans, create interventions to address those problems, and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). These interventions should include behavior management and cognitive behavior modification strategies to reduce classroom behavior problems.

Another evidence-based interventions for behavioral issues that will address the needs of struggling students is an extended year program or extended day, as well as summer school programs that facilitate the development of academic skills (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2009). In addition to this, it is important to include peer tutoring and mentoring programs that promote specific academic or social skills (Schnurr et al., 2009). Furthermore, adoption of inclusive school wide programs would promote the psychosocial and academic skills of all students.
Special education services are poorly incorporated into the regular education program as well as remediation services. Creating a partnership and consistency between these programs would serve as another effective intervention and it would ensure the success of students by having available resources at all levels (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Students need to be provided with effective interventions that accurately target deficits and build upon their strengths. Therefore, these interventions are life-saving for these students in the sense that they need the education to be successful in society.

Finally, providing teachers with professional development to review current research and policies would be a good opportunity for teachers to develop a better understanding of retention and serve as an intervention. Thompson and Allen’s (2012) study stated that professional development interventions could be created for teachers to provide them with individualized teaching practices. These programs are culturally relevant and sensitive to children’s academic and social needs, fostering and strengthening teachers’ relationships with children of different races, cultures, and incomes, particularly as they adjust into school. Henceforth, it is important to carefully consider both the academic and the social-emotional needs of students who are at risk in order to reduce retention as stated in this section.

Synthesis of Literature

The findings of this literature review concluded that retention is an ineffective practice with negative effects on students (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2009). This paper established a historical trajectory between retention and educational reform. With each reform, new standards are implemented forcing states to change the promotion standards, which increase grade retention. (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006; Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Murray et al., 2010). The trend place demands on academic achievement
and accountability (Peterson & Hughes, 2011). All the educational reforms did not increase students’ academic and behavioral performance.

The examination of retained students’ academic performance was discussed in this paper. Researchers Jimerson and his colleagues (1997), demonstrated in a longitudinal study that despite retention, growth in retained elementary students was positive. These same students fell behind as high school students (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). However, this phenomenon of grade retention has yielded adverse effects on struggling students retained (Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Their dropout rates are higher than peers who have moved on to the next grade (Crothers et al., 2010). Also, they score poorly on standardized tests (Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010). In addition, students who repeat the same grade are often placed in Special Education classes (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

In sharing the behavioral characteristics of a retained student, the studies clearly emphasized that grade retention displayed undesirable effects on behavioral performance especially when the retained children advance each year (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Students are often identified as bullies or victims and are not able to develop good peer relationships (Crothers et al., 2010).

The concerns about the over-identified population of students from racial/cultural as well as low-income backgrounds in comparison to White students were shared in this study (Gleason et al., 2007). Students of color and low socioeconomic status are retained more often than their peers who are White (Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersley, 2010).

During this study, there was an examination of teachers’ belief about retention. Teachers displayed their support of this retention (Witmer et al., 2004). Teachers admit they have no knowledge or exposure to current research on retention. Therefore, they kept utilizing the same
interventions over and over again. In addition, they must engage in interdisciplinary teaching, action research, and service premised on equity and social justice in order to reach students of color.

Finally, due to the negative impact of grade retention, it does not have to be the only intervention. The discussion included evidence based interventions used to provide instructional as well as social, behavioral supports for these students. This practice will reduce retention so that it does not have to be the only answer for struggling students. The implication for future research can be the continued study of various evidence based interventions and the effect they have on improving students’ academic and behavioral performance.

When it comes to the topic of grade retention, most researchers will readily agree that it yields a negative effect on students (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007; Stone & Engel, 2007; Willson & Hughes, 2009). Where this agreement usually ends, however, is the question of why retention is still utilized as an intervention for students struggling with academics. Whereas some are convinced that it does provide short-term growth, (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 2003; Abbott, Wills, Greenwood, Kamps, Heitzman-Powell, & Selig, 2010) others maintain that the short-term effects are not enough to help students succeed in school (Tanner & Galis, 1997; Tingle, Schoeneberger, & Algozzine, 2012).
Chapter III – Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention. The guiding research question for this qualitative study was: What were the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention?

A qualitative approach was an effective resource in developing a comprehensive analysis in this research (Creswell, 2013). The reason for selecting qualitative research design was it provided simple questions, which led to complex concerns when multiple answers were presented (Chenail, 1995). The qualitative research method was valuable for this research. It provided rich descriptions of complex phenomena: grade retention by tracking unique or unforeseen events, clarifying the experiences of teachers and interpreting of the events. The best part of this method was it gave a voice to teachers whose views were seldom heard.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm served as a set of assumptions (Ponterotto, 2005). These assumptions were a foundation in which the analysis of the research problem of practice was based. As a research paradigm, constructivism-interpretivism comprises the legitimacy established in “multiple realities of the data and multiple meanings of the phenomena within the collective interpretations of the individual researcher and the research-participants” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.131). Butin (2010) explicitly named the paradigm, interpretivism. I built and interpreted the data to tell a story of the participants. In the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, I actively worked with the teacher-participants for a deeper dialogue for greater understanding. The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and the teacher-participants were discovered and constructed the interpreted meaning of the study. The teacher–participants were
welcome to review the transcript and provided valuable feedback. The best fit of the paradigm was that I viewed as an equal participant as well as an observer (Ponterotto, 2005).

**Research Method**

As stated earlier, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study. An IPA approach was concise, with the primary purpose of offering insights into teachers’ experiences with grade retention, in the attempt to make sense of this phenomenon. IPA was rooted in phenomenology and hermeneutics (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Also, some critical theorists were associated with phenomenology. They were Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Lester, 1999). Therefore, it was necessary to review the connection IPA has with phenomenology and hermeneutics. In addition, there was a brief exploration of the main theorists’ approach to phenomenology to assist with understanding how this method supported the topic.

Phenomenology was a type of qualitative research that was very efficient at bringing the experiences and perceptions of individuals to the forefront, utilizing their own perspectives (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This process was important when interviewing teacher-participants about grade retention and using their experiences. This added an interpretive aspect to phenomenological research, allowing it to be used as the basis for the practical theory, which allowed it to inform, support or challenge policy and action (Lester, 1999). Pure phenomenological research seeks clean descriptions rather than explanations and hypotheses or preconceptions, thus eliciting free perspective (Lester, 1999). Working with phenomenology was hermeneutic. Similar to phenomenology, this research brought to the forefront and reflected phenomena as they appeared in everyday life before they have been tampered and abstracted.

**Key Theorists.** Leading theorists have assisted in forming the qualitative approach of
phenomenology. One originator was a German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, who founded the school of phenomenology (Dowling, 2007). As his work matured over time, he pursued developing a methodical foundational science based on phenomenological reduction. Husserl contended that "transcendental consciousness sets the limits of all possible knowledge" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). The definition for phenomenology was re-defined by Husserl as a transcendental-idealist philosophy (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology was Husserl’s revised effort to develop a method for grounding necessary truth. His thoughts deeply changed the landscape of philosophy in the twentieth century (Smith, 2004). He will remain a notable figure in contemporary philosophy.

Another leading German philosopher was Martin Heidegger. His ideas about phenomenology and existentialism have applied a seminal effect on the advancement of modern European philosophy (Gibbs, 2010). As a student and mentee of Husserl, he worked with him in revising phenomenology. His fondness and respect for Husserl inspired him to dedicate his book, *Being and Time* to him with the inscription “in friendship and admiration” (Gibbs, 2010). Taking the Husserlian problem one step further, Heidegger asked, “how something must be given in consciousness in order to be constituted” (Connelly, 2010). Phenomenology received a new meaning when Heidegger wanted to know the mode of being and how constitutes it. He was able to make phenomenology broader than Husserl. Whereas Husserl applied the term “phenomenology” to all of philosophy, Heidegger used it to designate a method (Dowling, 2007).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was a French philosopher of phenomenology who was profoundly influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty's primary interest was the meaning of human experiences. At the core of his philosophy was the ongoing argument on how
role perception interacts with understanding the world and engaging with the world. He was the only phenomenologist of the first half of the twentieth century to utilize sciences and descriptive psychology. This section, it displayed the progression of phenomenology through the work of key theorists. To this end, phenomenology has birthed a unique form of qualitative analysis named Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed by Jonathan Smith, served as an experiential qualitative method of research in the areas of psychology, the human, health, and the social sciences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This study utilized IPA because it embraced many of the phenomenological characteristics but allows the researcher to be incorporated into the survey as an instrument and co-interpreter (Dowling, 2007). IPA was the best-fit approach for this study on teachers’ experiences with grade retention. From the late nineteenth century, the methods of German phenomenological philosophers, Husserl and Heidegger evolved into the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). IPA created phenomenology’s recognition of the embedded researcher’s theoretical assumptions and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Also, IPA has a theoretic commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, and physical being, possessing a chain of connection between people’s talk, thinking, and emotional state (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In conducting interviews with teachers about grade retention, it was essential to make these types of connections to understand their experiences. IPA researchers realize this link can be complicated while people struggle to express their emotions. Therefore, will have to interpret people’s mental and emotional states (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In addition, IPA was widely used in social and clinical psychology, which involved mental processes (Smith, 1996).

**Reflexivity Journal and Field notes.** Despite the unresolved debate about bias in
qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008), I maintained a reflexivity journal, which helped me to facilitate reflexivity, in examining “personal assumptions and goals” and explaining “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695). The reflexivity journal served as a way of sharing my positionality, not for scrutiny or to control bias, but as an attempt to be more transparent. The reflexivity journal also assisted in maintaining alignment with the theoretical frameworks of Social and Cultural Capital Theories.

Field notes organized by date, time and location were written immediately after interviews. Utilizing the research question and study design, the field notes produced meaning and an understanding of the phenomena. Writing notes in a notebook helped to remember the interviewer’s comments during the process. Also, analysis of field notes could uncover emergent themes. By identifying emergent themes, I was able to shift my attention to more developed investigation of emerging themes.

**Population and Sampling**

The study site took place in a public, elementary school located in northern Fairfield County of Connecticut. The estimated population of the city was 84,657 and 29,046 households in the city. 44.1% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. The racial makeup of the city was 68.2% White, 25.0% Hispanic or Latino, 7.2% African-American, 0.40% Native American, 6.8% Asian, less than 0.10% Pacific Islander, 7.6% from other races, and 4.5% from two or more races. 32% of the population was foreign-born. The per capita income for the city was $31,411. 11.1% of the population was below the poverty line. The median gross monthly rent was $1,269. In 2015 the median income for a household in the city was approximately $66,676. This was a view of the city in which the study took place.
To maintain anonymity, the school was referred to as Center Elementary School. Four hundred and nine students attended Center Elementary School with the demographic as follows: 4.0% Asian, 6.7% Black or African American, 70.8% Hispanic/Latino, and 15% White, non-Hispanic. 82% of the four hundred and nine students were receiving reduced or free lunch. In addition, 49.9% of the student populations were English Language Learners. The student to teacher ratio at Center School was 15:1. This site was chosen for three reasons. In the district, Center School had the highest number of students retained each year. I utilized teachers from this school to explore their experiences with retention. Also, I maintained a professional association with the district as a middle school principal, so there was easy accessibility for teacher-participants and me to schedule and attended the interviews. In addition, the school demographic aligned with the statement of the problem.

For this study, the population encompassed six teacher-participants. The criteria included teachers: in primary grades kindergarten-third, with two years of teaching experience, who had retained a student and implemented scientific research-based interventions. All teacher-participants expect one selected their classroom to conduct the study. The other teacher-participant selected the diner in a neighboring town. The teachers’ classroom provided a comfortable interview setting. A sign was hung on the outside door to prevent interruptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Like the site, the participants were assigned pseudonym. Since relationships matter when holding interviews as an administrator in the district, these teacher-participants were familiar with me (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, researcher's familiarity and bias were balanced by strong listening skills coupled with reframing or revisiting questions.
Recruitment and Access

The next step was to receive the Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix A) for this study. After the approval was granted, I obtained permission to conduct the study from the Superintendent (Appendix B) and school principal. With their permission, a recruitment email (Appendix C) was sent to the Center School staff. Six teacher-participants met the criteria to be a part of the study. All interviews except one took place in the teachers’ classroom, which was in a comfortable setting and allowed for privacy. In a neighborhood, the diner was the setting of one teacher-participant due to family obligations. I went a half-hour early to establish a quiet stop for the interview in the diner. Before the interview Consent Form (Appendix D) was shared with teacher-participants. They agreed to move forward. Throughout the interview session, respect for the teacher-participants as highly qualified educators was demonstrated to build their trust in order to support the authenticity of the interview exchanges between the teacher and me (Seidman, 2006). The participants were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity as they participate in the sixty- minutes interview (Appendix E). Each interview consisted of open-ended questions in a semi-structured format to allow the teacher-participants to engage in a “one-sided” conversation with the researcher.

Data Collection

In many cases of an interpretative phenomenological study, the researcher often had experiences linked to the phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) discussed how "researchers in the phenomenological mode attempted to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (p. 23). Qualitative researchers were concerned with people’s interpretation of their experiences and how the world was constructed around them as well as the meaning that ascribed to their experiences (Merriam,
I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board to complete this study (Appendix A). For this study on teachers’ experiences with grade retention, interviews were the primary method for collecting data. Utilizing McNamara’s (2009) eight principles, I provided focused preparation stages in order to receive maximum benefit from the study. The preparation stages of interviewing were the following. First, it was selecting an appropriate setting that was free from distractions. Also, it was ensuring that the purpose of the interview was clear and concise. Next, it was addressing terms of confidentiality. In addition, describing the design and format of the interview was added. Another was indicating the length and duration of the interview. It continued with informing teacher-participants contact information for future questions as well as probing teacher-participants for any questions before beginning the interview and providing a recording device to recall the participants' answers.

A secure environment was provided for conducting the interviews in a classroom located at Center School. It was their school, so they felt comfortable to share information (Seidman, 2006). I allowed teacher-participants to schedule the meeting after school. A semi-structured interview was employed throughout this study. The interview was designed to allow the interviewer and teacher-participants to rebuild or reconstruct the specifics of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). The questions were provided to support the theoretical framework of Social and Cultural Capital Theories. In addition, it was essential that teacher-participants were able to share the information on the various level in order to connect to the topic. Despite the fact that the interviews were constructed as semi-structured concerning the questions or focus of the interview, it was important to allow the participants to have open-ended responses. Causing the interview responses to be open-ended enabled the participants to contribute more detailed
information and give an opportunity to ask probing questions as a follow-up (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). It was vital to note that this type of interview when coding the data may provide difficulties to identify similar themes from a full interview transcript (Creswell, 2013). However, this type of semi-structured interview reduced biases by demanding specific themes and codes (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). According to Seidman (2006), the interview structure combined characteristics that increase validity. It placed teacher-participants' remarks in context and permitted them the opportunity to check the internal constancy of the conversation within the interviews. I was able to obtain the goal of understanding how the participants understood and made meaning of their experiences. The interview protocol (Appendix E) was created by utilizing Seidman’s guideline. In addition, I provided the necessary components to conduct a face-to-face interview to obtain views and opinions from the teacher-participants (Creswell, 2013). During the interview, the questions were verbally stated one at a time to each participant. The effect of the questions on each teacher-participant was watched and nonverbal behavior recorded in my field notes while aligning it with the theoretical frameworks and research question. The questions will meet the criteria of description, not to intimidate the teacher-participants but encourage them to share their experienced phenomenon. The timeline for all interviews was about two weeks. Each interview was audio-recorded on an iPhone using an electronic software called AudioMemos. This program has no limit to audio-length, and electronic recordings can be transferred to a computer as mp4 files. The electronic recordings of the interviews and all other electronic documents will be downloaded and then saved to an USB flash drive and personal external hard drive. All files will be encrypted and password-protected. Throughout the research process and after, the researcher will store data in a lock box with a password-protected combination. (Creswell, 2013).
In conducting recorded one-on-one interviews of the six teacher-participants, I hoped to produce the good, qualitative data of teacher perspectives and lived experiences (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). To further the introspection, documents such as field notes and the reflexivity journal will provide contextual information.

**Data Analysis**

The process of reviewing the data from transcripts of interviews and identifying themes is called data analysis. I utilized the following steps suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) and Creswell (2013) to analyze the data for the study. In Step 1, the researcher was engrossed in organizing the data by multiple read-throughs. At this point, keywords and phrases were highlighted in line-by-line readings of the interview transcriptions. Some coding techniques can be mixed and matched to a qualitative study (Saldaña, 2013). The study employed the in vivo coding for highlighting quoted participants’ responses. The technique “keeps the data rooted in the participant’s language” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 7) which provided authenticity and real responses. In other words, in vivo coding “honors” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 61) the teacher-participants’ distinctive voice. In addition, handing coding was used as well to narrow the key phrase even more to create themes. This was important for a study that was built on the interpretations of teachers sharing their experiences with grade retention, since they may not often have a voice in the educational policies. Also, Fredrickson’s (2001) suggestion to measure emotion coding was added in the study. He stated that “subjective experience, facial expression, cognitive processing, and physiological changes” (p. 218) should be highlighted to depict participant feelings. Emotion coding was mainly applicable to IPA study since it explored teacher-participants’ perspectives and experiences with grade retention. It was
important to note the participant's emotions like moods or attitudes was added to affect coding (Fredrickson, 2001).

I looked for categories and patterns through line-by-line color-coded highlighting to interpret credible, contrasting, and comparative data that developed into four generalized themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This required me to work backward and forward to triangulate the data with research questions, theories, and research paradigm in order to interpret the findings (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; Creswell, 2013). I weaved the codes and themes to create one meaningful passage (Saldaña, 2013). The data became “custom-built, revised, and ‘choreographed’” (Creswell, 2013, p. 182) through a recursive process. In addition, a field note was added to analysis as well as the reflexivity journal to assist in defining the developing themes.

In Step 2, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis incorporated not only the distinctive expressions of each teacher-participant but also interpreted the experiences that will slowly unfold. I used deconstruction to add a deeper understanding of teacher-participants' intentions. Deconstruction required researchers to approach a sentence at different points, not just the beginning in order to gain an understanding of certain words in a participant’s phrasing. In addition, I was able to see with clarity the context and relationship of the interpretation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Field notes were reviewed again at this point to allow me an opportunity to emerge and align with the developing themes adding to the reflexivity journal as well.

In Step 3, I probed even deeper into the analysis. Each teacher-participants’ words and nonverbal affects was broken down, analyzed, and re-examined. In the first half of the hermeneutic circle, emergent themes developed through recurrent categorizations of the data. It
was essential to find the right words to explain themes as they developed (Saldaña, 2013). I moved into the final interpretative narrative between researcher and teacher-participants to merge interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This concluded the second half of the hermeneutic analytic circle.

In Step 4, I connected the emergent themes, wrote the narrative of their essence, and provides the findings (Creswell, 2013). At this point, the research question was answered while connecting the findings through the theoretical frameworks of the Social and Cultural Capital theories. In addition, the finding will reveal elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention.

**Trustworthiness**

The integrity of qualitative research depends greatly on the implementation of credibility, or validity, of the study (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). This was determined by how well a researcher has established confidence in the findings based on the research design, participants, and context (Ary et al., 2006). The obligation to represent participants in an accurate position provided assurances in the report (Ary et al., 2006). Therefore, it was essential when obtaining qualitative data the process utilizes the application of checking, confirming, and being assured that the collection of data were reliable and valid (Morse, Barrett, Mayna, Olson, & Spier, 2002).

The driving purpose of the qualitative research was the ability to describe or understand the phenomena from the teachers’ viewpoint. The teacher-participants were the only ones who can legally judge the credibility of the findings. Since triangulation was the use of multiple sources of data, multiple observers, and multiple methods, it was used to support the interviews and findings, ensuring credibility in this paper. Participants were allowed to read all transcripts
to ensure accuracy and validity. By using member checks, the participants were allowed to review and critique field notes to correct miscommunications, identify inaccuracies, and help obtain additional data sources (Ary et al., 2006). Participants were given two opportunities to increase validity and trustworthiness of the study. They examined the transcripts for accuracy after the interviews. Also, after the final analyses of the interviews were finished, they were given an opportunity to disclose any discrepancies discovered in the documented transcripts. To ensure this study was trustworthy and valid, teacher-participants were signed a document stating the accuracy of the transcript or document any discrepancies. This process allowed teacher-participants an opportunity to engage in comments, questions, and feedback during the study.

By utilizing the qualitative, constructivist-interpretivist model, it allowed less restriction in the methodology. This provided a journey of new and emerging ideas. When supported by multiple sources of data findings made “to a holistic and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon” (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013, p. 7) supporting the validity of the study. Also, theoretical frameworks of Social and Cultural Capital Theories helped to triangulate the various data sources for not only increased understanding of the problem of practice but also for increased validity in the research (Johnson, 1997).

Transferability was defined as the ability to transfer results of the study to similar settings (Ary et al., 2006). Also, it was the degree that the findings of a qualitative study utilizing the Social and Cultural Capital Theories could be generalized to other contexts or other groups. It was the researcher’s responsibility to provide appropriate, detailed descriptions of the context so that future users can adopt the needed comparisons and judgments about similarity, which makes it transferable (Ary et al., 2006). In this study, transferability was provided through careful, articulated data collection and analysis in the story-filled details of the transcribed tapes of the
individual teacher-participant interviews as well as the transparent sharing of field notes and reflexivity journal.

Dependability can best be defined as the trustworthiness of the research in which the researcher needs to demonstrate that the methods used were replicable and consistent and appropriate to be documented (Ary et al., 2006). I ensured dependability by establishing an audit trail. This included gathering the raw data, maintaining detailed and organizing records of procedures, interview protocols, transcriptions, and the conduction of data analysis (Ary et al., 2006).

Achieving the levels of objectivity in a qualitative study was impossible. Therefore, the focus had to change direction from the “neutrality of the researcher to the confirmability of the data and interpretations” (Ary et al., 2006 p. 34). This study incorporated the audit trail and participant review of transcripts as two strategies for demonstrating confirmability. Another strategy used to deal with subjectivity was reflexivity (Johnson, 1997). Reflexivity was being mindful and critical of bias and positionality during the research process. The positionality statement of this thesis acknowledged bias while aspiring to create credibility within the problem of practice of discovering and describing the perspectives of teachers’ experiences with grade retention. As principal for the school district, I worked closely with teachers who identify students at the end of the school year for grade retention. In order to separate my personal experience with grade retention as a principal and a former classroom teacher, I used epoche. Moustakas (1994) referred to epoche as a process that the researcher should take part in before starting the interview, so that any past experiences, associations, or biases may not impact the interview. The epoche was a continuous process to be used throughout the research. Before each interview, I wrote my thoughts in my reflexivity journal in an attempt to group biases and
prejudices, a total of three entries. The first journal entry was of a personal disclosure as I explored my experience with retaining students. The second journal entry displayed feelings, views, and reactions regarding the responses from the interview. The third journal entry, which was the final journal entry, was similar to the second; yet, it summarized the process, helping me to identify biases and preconceptions that existed in order to prevent barriers to the research.

Overall, using the constructivist-interpretivist lens, the application of the theoretical frameworks of Social and Cultural Capital Theories, guidance of the research questions, the reflexive data collection and double hermeneutic interpretive analysis, and the recognition of the positionality were all acknowledged throughout the research timeframe. This confirmed the validity, or trustworthiness, in this IPA qualitative study on exploring elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Approval by Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A) was confirmed allowing the research study to proceed ethically. Superintendent (Appendix B) and Center School’s principal provided permission to conduct this study within the elementary school. This was the pseudonyms name for the elementary school in this study. Consent forms (Appendix D) was reviewed and shared with each of the six teachers. Confidentiality of the teacher-participants was assured through pseudonyms. Once the recording was transcribed, the draft and later the final study was made available to the teacher-participants for member-checking review and possible changes (Appendix F). I am acquainted with the school and site of the study. Therefore, I was confident that the principal would allow me full access to in-depth data collections. Research work with human participants requires that the scholar-practitioner understand the position of power she possesses. Therefore, I pledged to treat the participants as
individuals and not as objects or as inferior. In addition, I aimed to take into account
preconceptions of privileged universals, which make one the traits and the language of the
domination and thus "marginalizes, disenfranchises, subordinates, and generally ascribes
inferiority to characteristics that differ from the privileged groups' characteristics" (Briscoe,
2005, p. 27). Participants who were not honest with the researcher can sabotage the research.
On the other hand, participants might respond falsely to please the researcher or for their desire
to either sway or skew the research (Briscoe, 2005). To this end, I recognized the potential
vulnerability and ethical challenges of these participants, who were teachers retaining students in
the same school district. Vulnerability addresses human participants who "may have insufficient
power, intelligence, education, resources, strength, or other needed attributes to protect their
interests" (Levine, Faden, Grady, Hammerschmidt, Eckenwiler, & Sugarman, 2004, p. 3).
Despite Creswell's (2013) thoughts about the hazards of power imbalance and job-related
political risks when conducting a study with known participants, it was important to highlight
Rubin and Rubin's (2012) notion of the benefits. Working in the same district with the teacher-
participants, I have cultivated trust that was supported in Stake's notions of the researcher with
"an insider view [thus], seeking to understand the human experience" in data discoveries (as
cited in Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013, p. 1269). Continuing the argument,
Van Manen (1990) argued that the sensitive researcher, who values relationships, could "only
understand something or someone for whom we care" (p. 6). Therefore, this study's participants
were samples from elementary school in the same school district as a researcher. As stated
before, I obtained permission from the Superintendent and School Principal to move forward
with the interviews. At that time, a recruitment email (Appendix C) was sent to all teachers at
Center School. There were eleven responses to the email. Only six teachers qualified to
participate in the study by having taught in grades kindergarten–third, two years of teaching retained a student and familiar with scientific research-based interventions. I called each of the six participants to schedule a time to conduct the interview. Prior to the interview, the Consent Form (Appendix D) was shared with participants. It explained the purpose of the study and a detailed description of the voluntary participation, along with the description of the audio tapings to be used, at risks or inconveniences, confidentiality and privacy issues, and key benefits to the profession. Also, in the letters will include contact phone numbers and email address for any questions of advisory or me. All data will be stored for three years in a locked box and a password-protected data storage such as a flash drive. Since this study addressed the perspectives and interpretations of teacher-participants who work in the district, I remained conscious of listening to their voice and upholding their viewpoint. Through member checking, the accuracy of their viewpoints and words was preserved.

Reciprocity

It was essential to demonstrate reciprocity within qualitative research (Robertson, 2000). The origin of the word reciprocity was found in the Latin word *reciprocity*. It means "moving back and forth" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This meaning was suitable when describing a relationship between a researcher and participant. A researcher must acknowledge the potential of establishing a reciprocal relationship with participants (Robertson, 2000). Participants shared valuable time, effort, energy, and experiences to further the researcher's study (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). Henceforth, reciprocity should not be utilized in the sense of "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours," but in a "more ethical stance rather than a simplistic exchange of goods or tolerance" (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013, p. 987). Therefore, reciprocity was necessary for qualitative study. Lincoln and Denzin (2000) connected reciprocity to philosophical
foundations named “sacred epistemology” (p.1052) emphasizing the interconnectivity between the knowledge production and the ethics of production. Also, Edwards, Sebba, and Rickinson (2007) employed the term “reciprocity of professionalism” which argued for a “public” that “speaks back to science” framing reciprocity as a device for upholding the accountability and transparency between researcher, teacher-participants as well as the academic community (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013, p. 991). Henceforth, I was more interested in reciprocity beyond the concept of "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." Therefore, I crafted reciprocity throughout the research process in several ways. In order to initiate a reciprocal relationship during the interviews, it was essential to make teachers feel comfortable by starting the session by inquiring about their well-being and allowing them to share information (Robertson, 2000). I valued participants’ response to interview questions regarding grade retention by providing them with opportunities to review for accuracy correct transcripts, data collection, and data analysis (Appendix F) (Ary et al., 2006; Morse, Barrett, Mayna, Olson, & Spier, 2002; Trainor, & Bouchard, 2013). This helped encourage teacher-participants’ collaboration during the research. In addition, I shared findings directly with participants, listening intently to their reactions and feedbacks to what they believed the next steps or future implications should be in regards to this study (Morse, Barrett, Mayna, Olson, & Spier, 2002; Robertson, 2000).

Many efforts were made to identify mutual interests and trust with the teacher-participants. Yet, I believed it was important to acknowledge the non-participants such as the district and school administrators who afforded me the opportunity to conduct this research (Johnson, 1997; Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). I shared the findings from the study, listen intently to their feedback, needs, and expectations. In addition, I provided professional development for
the staff on grade retention to enhance a reciprocal relationship.

**Limitations**

It was pertinent that a researcher identifies limitations within the study. Limitations of the study can be defined as "those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research" (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). Being proactive in identifying and acknowledging the study's limitations spares the researcher from having professors or colleagues bring them to the forefront. It should be seized as an opportunity to make implications for further research.

For this study, six elementary teacher-participants were selected from a school district in Northern Fairfield County. Currently, I am a middle school principal in the same school district. A limitation can be teacher-participants responding falsely in order to make a good impression (Briscoe, 2005). I planned to counteract that by ensuring all teacher-participants that they were treated as individuals and encourage them to speak freely, expressing their opinions in order to provide a valid study. There were many elementary schools in the city. Therefore, I do not know the future teacher-participants, personally. Yet, it was vital that I listed this as a limitation because it still presents a small probability.

Teachers-participants could be incorporated from multiple schools in the city. All teacher-participants were from Center School. The data displayed that Center School has the highest-grade retention in the school district. At a starting point, I wanted to capture these teacher-participants' views on grade retention in order to build a foundation for future implications. In doing so, it could also be a limitation and appear not to provide transferability.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of scholarly research on the topic of elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention. The research was still underdeveloped
about teachers promoting grade retention for students (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). A majority of the literature has been directed at the impact that retention has on student academic and behavioral performance (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Teachers' understanding of grade retention was in the adolescent stage (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2010).

Data Storage

Data that exists in qualitative research contain pertinent information about participants and the process of obtaining data. In order to protect the teachers' rights and the study procedures, an efficient data storage system was created to ensure comfortability, trustworthiness, and validity of the process. Items that were protected were the identities of teacher-participants, transcribed interviews, audio recordings, reflexivity journal, field notes, and various types of written texts. Both hard and electronic copies were utilized in managing and storing the data.

During the interviews, the information was handwritten at the site. A cell phone was used as a recording device using AudioMemo. Once the interview was transcribed, I sent a copy via email to the participants to review and clarify any inaccuracies (Ary et al., 2006). At this point, the typed transcriptions were saved to an individual electronic file folder on my computer, which was password protected. The use of a USB stick was important to back up electronic data.

The audio recording of the interview from the cellphone was uploaded to a laptop, which stored the audio recording of each session to ensure that valuable information was not missed and later transcribed and coded in iVivo11. Both these devices were password protected. Also, hard copies were printed out for dissemination if needed. Each teacher-participants’ information were saved as a paper copy, in an individual file using pseudonyms to maintain anonymity (Ary
et al., 2006). This information also included handwritten transcription of the interview, and their return email indicating changes and approvals of the transcriptions. All paper data and the USB stick were stored for three years in a lock box (Ary et al., 2006).
EXPLORING TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH GRADE

CHAPTER IV – Analysis of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention. The guiding research question for this qualitative study was: What are the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention? The study examined the lived experiences of teachers in grades Kindergarten through third who have utilized the practice of retention throughout their profession. There were six teachers –participants who qualified for the study. They were white females ranging from five to twenty-five years of teaching experience. Pseudonyms were used to keep each teacher-participant’s identity confidential. Table 1 is a description of teacher-participants and their responses to the necessary criteria (Appendix G).

Four themes were derived from this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study. The first theme was It Is In The Blood in which teacher-participants shared personal information about themselves. These set of questions were utilized in the beginning of the interview in order to develop a relationship and relax the participants. It was surprising to see a theme emerged during the coding process. The second theme was This Is How We Do It. Here the teacher –participants described a full depiction of their experiences with grade retention. The third theme was identified as Looking Into the Mirror. Teacher-participants reflected on the earlier statements in the interviews, gaining an understanding of the phenomenon. The fourth theme was Can It Be the Only Intervention? Teacher-participants expressed a need for alternatives to replace grade retention. This chapter provided a profile for each participant. Also, it shared the results of the analysis and how the data was gathered from the interviews. In
addition, the coding process will be explored to develop a better understanding on how the themes emerged. A synthesis of themes was conducted in order to align the theoretical frameworks: Social and Cultural Capital Theory with the study. Reflexivity allowed me to find strategies to examine attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, in order to understand the complex roles in relation to others (Ortlipp, 2008).

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Only six participants qualified to participate in the study as they met the criteria established in the recruitment letter. Their profiles are presented to inform the reader of the attributes of each teacher-participant.

Ginger. Like a majority of the participants, Ginger wanted to meet in her classroom at Center Elementary School. Though the interview took place after school hours, the school was still buzzing with activity. Many teachers were still wrapping up their day, and there was an active extended learning program. In the office, the secretary provided directions to Ginger’s classroom. The hallways leading to her room displayed artwork, posters, and student recognition certificates. Ginger was quick to offer a warm smile and greeting as she extended her hand to shake. She provided a comfortable chair for me to sit and conduct the sixty-minute interview. The classroom had various learning centers for her kindergarteners to explore. The classroom was enriched by a large number of books, words, letters, numbers, and other instructional aids. Student work was neatly displayed throughout the room. It made the classroom feel warm and inviting. There was a rocking chair in the corner placed on a two-toned carpet in which the students sat to participate in a read-aloud or other school activities. At the kidney table in her classroom, the interview began. Her willingness to share her experiences was impactful. Ginger has been a Kindergarten teacher for 14 years. She knew since
kindergarten that she wanted to be a teacher. When she was asked as a child, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" She drew a picture of a teacher. Ginger's parents came from Portugal. She and her siblings were the first generations born in the United States, as well as the first generation to attend college. During her 14 years of teaching, Ginger retained seven students. She stated, "God, I feel like the worst person in the world when I retain." Students she retained were not performing academically or had behavior problems. Despite the feeling "like the worst person," she maintained that grade retention was an effective practice. Towards the end of the interview, she was relaxed and felt confident with her responses to the questions.

**Stacy.** Upon entering Stacy’s classroom, it was apparent that she took great pride in the physical layout. The room was bright with the décor of pastel colors. Student work and anchor charts covered the walls. Four large tables with students’ names were in place of desks. There was a corner with a comfortable chair and area carpet for calendar work. Though Stacy’s greeting was warm and polite, she was a little nervous during the introduction. Stacy has only been tenured for less than two years, which placed her at six years of being a Kindergarten teacher at Center School. Several members of Stacy’s family were educators including her mother. She stated, “It’s kind of in the blood.” The more responses Stacy provided, the more comfortable and relaxed she became. Throughout her six years of teaching, Stacy retained four Hispanic students. She noted during the interview, “Three of these students tested into Special Education.” Despite her retaining students, she stated, “There is not enough training in graduate school.” Therefore, she is not familiar with current research on grade retention. In addition, Stacy thought retaining a student in the primary grade is better. “They’re just too young to understand. It does not matter to them at this time.” She gained more confidence towards the end of the interview.
Annie. Walking into this first-grade classroom was interesting. On the left, Annie created an interactive word wall and writing center. The word wall was interactive because all the words were attached with Velcro so that students could take the words to their desk. The Math area had math manipulates and bins. The classroom had chair pockets on the back of all students’ chairs. The supplies were in the middle of the tables for students to use. The centers were set up for learning. The classroom was well organized and a conducive place for learning. Instead of a handshake, Annie decided to use a hug to introduce herself. This was a little surprising, but she stated, “I come from a family of huggers.” Later in the interview, it was apparent that this behavior was genuine. Annie has been a first-grade teacher for five years at Center School. Annie believed that one of the rewards of teaching this grade level is seeing the progress and growth of students. She stated, “Often they enter first grade not able to read or write, but by the end of the year they are different people.” Annie has retained two Hispanic students and one Portuguese student in her five years of teaching. As a teacher, Annie stated, “It is hard to retain a student. It may impact the child’s chances to qualify for Special Education.” She felt it was essential to keep this in mind when dealing with developing children.

Brenda. Out of all the teacher-participants, Brenda requested to meet at a diner in a neighboring town. She had a family obligation, which mandated this accommodation. The diner was large, well lit and had areas to meet with minimal noise. I arrived a half-hour earlier to ensure a good position within the diner. Brenda arrived and extended a friendly introduction. She had twenty-one years of teaching experience. At the table, she shared how her grandmother taught in a one-room classroom; also, her husband is currently a high school teacher as well. When asked, "Why did you become a teacher?" Brenda replied, "I always liked working with young kids. I couldn't image myself doing anything else.” Over her professional career of
twenty-one years, Brenda retained twelve students. There were eight students who were Hispanic, and four who were Portuguese. "Grade retention is taken seriously; it is a process that involves teacher, student, parents, and the school administrator. It is not taken lightly," stated Brenda. With a student struggling academically, time cannot elapse within the classroom. Brenda said, "As soon as I think the student is below grade level in the different academic areas, I begin this process." She felt this was an important process.

**Julie.** Entering the main office, Julie was waiting behind the front desk. She was a second-grade teacher for over twenty-five years. She was the most senior of the teacher-participants. Julie displayed confidence and wisdom as she shared her story. She remembered the way things were several years ago. Julie always wanted to be a teacher. She always babysat. She loved being around children. She started referring to challenges of teaching. It is too much. We need to compartmentalize, things need to be blended like more reading in science and social studies as well as integrate the vocabulary and phonics.” Julie was passionate about this concept explaining, "Students are not having the whole experience of learning due to the lack of blending different subjects to teach.” In Julie's twenty-five years, she retained five students. In comparison to the other teachers, this was a low number of retainees over a long period of teaching. Speaking to her practice in retaining a student, "The parents must be on board, or there will be resentment," replied Julie. She felt that retention is an effective practice.

**Polly.** In Center School, the third graders were located on the second floor. Therefore, I had to locate Polly's classroom in that area. Before reaching Polly's room, the warm school climate filled the hallways. This continued into Polly's classroom. We greeted each other at the same time; yet, it was not awkward but comfortable as if we had known each other before, despite it being our first meeting. She offered a chair to begin our interview. Polly has been teaching for
sixteen years. She was heavily influenced to be a teacher by her mother who was a Kindergarten teacher for thirty years. Also, all the females in her family were teachers as well. Throughout her career, she has retained ten students: nine Hispanic and one Asian. She strongly believed in her decision to retain a student for "low reading level and lack of maturity. Students must be low in both Reading and Math". Polly believed this to be an effective method.

At this point, the results of the data analysis were gathered and presented in order to display the four themes that emerged from the process. Working in the same school district is one relationship that is shared with the participated. It is a large school district with over 10,000 students. In addition, Center School joins thirteen elementary schools in this district. Participant knew me as an administrator at a middle school. I met a majority of the participants at the interview. Hence, one participant was a former student of mine and the other was a parent whose child attended my school.

**THEME DEVELOPMENT**

A qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was used to conduct this research. Numerous sub-categories emerged within each interview. Therefore, these sub-categories had to be analyzed in which they revealed categories. A narrative description of each theme will be shared as theme development is reviewed.

**IT IS IN THE BLOOD**

The first theme was focused on the teacher participants’ backgrounds by examining personal information like the reason for becoming a teacher, relatives who were educators, rewards of teaching as well as the challenges. As stated earlier, the purpose of these set of questions were to develop a relationship and relax the participants. It was astounding to see a theme emerged during the coding process. This part of the interview was essential because it
helped establish a relationship with teacher-participants and built trust. Starting the process with a warm and friendly introduction provided an opportunity for teachers to share their personal lives and experiences willingly. They were comfortable and relaxed during the interview.

**Why I Became A Teacher**

Teacher-participants expressed a profound love and joy as the primary reasons they became teachers. Ginger answered, “I always loved working with kids. When I was younger, I worked at a daycare. This is where it began.” Brenda shared the same feeling as Ginger. She mentioned, “I always like working with young kids. I could not imagine myself doing anything else.” Julie believed, “…I loved being around kids, and I just thought that was the path that I wanted to take.” Polly smiled saying, “They make you happy.” Also, this teacher-participant had family relatives who were educators. Stacey stated, “It is kind of in the blood. All of my aunts, my mother, and seven cousins are teachers. It has always been a part of me.” Brenda shared that her grandmother taught in a one-room schoolhouse for years and her husband is a high school Math teacher.” Annie shared, “It runs in the family, first of all. My grandmother was a teacher; my aunt was a teacher so I’ve been around people who are teachers and I always loved kids.” Polly’s mother was a Kindergarten teacher for over thirty years. The only teacher-participant who did not have a family member as an educator was Ginger. She was the first generation in the United States and to attend college, as her parent came from Portugal. She stated, “They were a factory workers.” Education was valued. Watching students mature and grow were other reasons for teaching. “I think probably just the growth that you see within one year,” expressed Julie. Other teacher-participants shared this opinion like Julie. Polly said, “Just teaching them and seeing them grow and gain knowledge is powerful.” Stacey strongly
stated, “I don’t think everyone can do it …(teach). I think you have to have a passion for it and not allow students to quit.”

**Rewards of the Job**

Student learning was a reward for teacher-participants. As educators, each teacher-participant agreed that watching students learn was the most rewarding at the primary level. Annie responded, “You can see the progression day by day. It is so rewarding to experience. Within a year, they are different people,” she shared. Brenda likes the excitement they display for learning. “Seeing them excited about a topic is fun to watch,” responded Brenda. Another reward for teachers was observing the younger student enjoy beginning in the classroom and especially loving their teacher. Polly explained, “They love you, and they believe in everything you have to say.” Stacey shared that students continue to visit her after moving on to the next grade. Stacey said, “Students in 5th grade miss recess time to help me.” Stacey was grateful that students remembered her. Julie felt that the greatest reward of teaching was the impact you have on students. She loved the growth they made, as well as connection she made. “I can be more than just a teacher to them. I can be their confidant if they need to talk.” In addition, teacher-participants felt that this connection is extended to students’ parents. Parents are comfortable meeting and discussing concerns about their child, expecting assistance from the teacher. Ginger stated, “My classroom is open to my students and their families if they are in need.” These are rewards of teaching.

**Challenges of the Job**

There is a common consensus among teacher-participants that one of the challenges of teaching primary school students is the curriculum. The requirements and expectations for students are too high. Ginger remembered, "We weren't teaching addition and subtraction in
Kindergarten in the past. The work is more challenging now." Julie offered, "A more integrated curriculum would be nicer and a more exciting fit for the kids." Brenda remembered that Kindergartners only had to know the colors of numbers and 26 letters of the alphabet. "Now the expectation is they're going to be reading at a level four or six, which is three to four sentences on a page. That's a big jump," stated Brenda. In addition, due to budgetary constraints, paraprofessionals were cut from the classrooms. "We are doing more with fewer resources," Ginger continued. Annie explained, "They got rid of the paras for the first time, so now it is us with 20 to 25 1st graders, and there is no help." Another challenge of teaching is the large population of English Language Learners (ELL) that attends Center Elementary School. Of the 409 students, 88% are Hispanic, and the majority of them are ELLs. "It is difficult to instruct the students whose first language is not English. It is more difficult trying to communicate with parents," said Stacey. In addition, 82% of the 409 students are receiving reduced or free lunch. Too often, teachers have to provide financial assistance to students of poverty. "A little boy came improperly dressed for the extreme cold weather. He had on shorts and a pajama top with no socks," said Brenda. She got him appropriate attire. Sometimes, students have no snack or have to be subsidized for lunches as well as field trips.

**THIS IS HOW WE DO IT**

The second theme, This Is How We Do It found in the study was specific experiences of teachers with grade retention broken into four sub-themes. These sub-themes focused on the reasons teachers retained a student. It provided details of the experiences and began to focus on teacher- participants’ perceptions concerning grade retention. Also, it explored the protocol and process to retain a student in school. However, grade retention cannot move forward unless it receives permission from an administrator and in some states a parent (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009).
It is important to understand the role administrators and parents play in holding a child back in the same grade. In addition, this theme determined if the retention was successful as it examines students’ progress after the retention.

**The Reason Students Are Held Back**

There were several reasons teacher-participants recommended grade retention. These reasons were mostly related to student academic performance, immaturity leading to behavioral problems, English Language Learners (ELLs) and poverty. In the case of academic performance, Polly retained students who were slightly below grade level, and who needed an extra year. She stated, "I analyzed the standards and compared them to where the child needs to be for the next grade; that leads me to the decision of retaining." Stacey monitors monthly assessments to make that determination. "They must do the work independently, or they will be held back," she explained. Research showed that teachers often retain students due to academic performance, which is the major reason for holding a student back (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Annie responded, "One student didn't know her sight words, letters or sound. She wasn't decoding, just wasn't ready to read and the same with her Math. I just had to retain her; I couldn't send her on." Also, immaturity is a reason to retain a student. Ginger said, "You've got your December babies, needing more time to catch up and get on grade level." Brenda expressed, "Some cases were immaturity, you know they just weren't ready to go on. They were struggling academically; they just weren't ready." Teacher-participants agreed that English Language Learners are being retained. Ginger said, "I've kept back ELLs because either they're brand new to the country or they don't know the skills even in their language to move to the next grade level. In addition, students who are living in poverty seem to be retained due to lack
of resources. Ginger also stated, "They're kids who are not getting a lot of support at home…A lot of our poor families."

**The Process to Retain a Student**

The protocol to retain has several steps. At Center School, all teachers utilized the Scientific-Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) protocol (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2003). This is the first step. It is a three-tiered intervention framework that emphasizes the role of general education. SRBI focuses on providing instruction and intervention in regular education (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2003). At the onset of concern regarding academic and behavioral performance, teacher-participants implemented this high-quality instruction through the use of research-based instructional strategies. Teacher-participants agreed that this process must take place before considering retention for a student. Teachers have to complete tier one. Polly stated, “Students are referred to School Interventionists who conduct tiers two and three with students who are struggling academically.” Stacey stated, “Students at this point are monitored every six to eight weeks and given grade-level assessments.” Keeping the parents in the loop is important. Brenda expressed, “When I think a student is below grade level, I meet with parents in January because November conferences are too soon.” Yet, Brenda documents the lack of growth on the report card or progress report card to keep parents aware. All teacher-participants call at least two meetings with parents, Social Worker, English as a Second Language teacher, and Special Education teacher. Teacher-participants agreed, if the student does not show any growth for the year, a team decision is made to retain the child; then the matter is brought before the principal and parent.

**Principal/Parent Feedback to Grade Retention**
Teacher-participants at Center School agreed that their principal is supportive of their decision to hold a student back a year. Polly explained, "He's involved. He listens, and he trusts our decisions." The principal meets with staff and reviews the documentation before meeting with parents. Stacey said, "I don't think he would go against us as long as we have the documentation." The principal is a former Special Education teacher, and all teacher-participants agreed that he brings his background knowledge in to help make the decision. Brenda quoted the principal who said, "Whatever you guys need. I will make it happen." Also, he assists with difficult meetings in which parents may become upset or angry. According to teacher–participants, "At the conference, he doesn't just sit and listen. He's an active participant." Teacher-participants agreed that the principal has the final say in the matter; yet, he allows them to move forth with the process. Annie expressed, "It is nice to have him back you up if needed."

Teacher-participants agreed that a majority of parents are agreeable to grade retention. Ginger said, "They feel you know what is best for their child." Polly mentioned, "I am surprised when they thank me for all my help." On the other hand, some parents do not always agree with the decision to have their child repeat the same year. Usually, the principal starts the conversation, explaining to the parents the benefits of retention and encouraging them to join the school in helping their child. In addition, he states that this is going to make every day easier next year. Parents either agree or disagree with the retention. Brenda explained, "Most of the time, the emotions from parents can be either concerned about the matter, disappointed or angry." Brenda continued by saying, “at times, they almost feel like the child is doing something wrong." Parents saw a negative stigma with retention. "We try to make parents understand," said Brenda. "This is a good thing, they're getting an extra year, and it is a gift."
Stacey shared her experience with parents who did not want their child retained and called a meeting to discuss her concerns. "They were totally against it and did not want to discuss it with me." Stacey continued to document the child's progress. Sad to say, it did not improve. Therefore, another meeting was called. "The mother agreed that there was a problem. The father refused to acknowledge his daughter's struggle." In June, a meeting was called with the principal, Social Worker, and teacher. "The father still did not agree, and the little girl was allowed to move ahead." Under state laws, the principal could retain a student (Martin, 2011). Yet, according to Stacey, "It was not good to get into an argument or cause conflict. It only impacts the child in the long run." Brenda stated, "If the parent does not want grade retention, then I do not do it. I need them on my side, and maybe they are not ready for the information."

**Future of Retained Students**

The teacher-participants’ responses varied as to monitoring student progress after they had been retained. They all displayed an interest. They expressed signs of feeling restricted when inquiring about the student. Julie stated, “I nonchalantly ask questions of the current teacher. I try not to be too involved.” Annie’s response merited validation of her choice as she expressed, “I checked on her to make sure that retention was a good decision. It’s for future reference with my current students.” Polly’s response was parallel with Annie’s when she stated, “I try my best to keep up with them just to see how they are doing and to see if it was a good decision or not, and most of the time it is.” Julie said, “I follow them while they are in the school but when they leave it’s a different story.”

It was evident among teacher-participants that they did not want to seem overbearing to the colleague, asking a question about the retainee. On the other side, a majority of the teacher-participants agreed that holding a student back a year was not always right. Many of the
retained students ended up qualifying for Special Education. Ginger felt, “It was a double whammy. They were retained, and now they are in Special Education. In some cases, we should wait a year.” Julie expressed, “I hope they do better wherever they end up.”

LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR

Teacher- participants were asked to reflect more in-depth on the meaning of their experiences. Questions required comprehensive replies, which were analyzed and coded into detail categories. Teacher- participants expressed that grade retention was a useful practice. Despite their belief, they questioned and had concerns regarding grade retention. Teacher- participants acknowledged that they were not aware of the current research about grade retention.

Teachers’ Beliefs About Grade Retention

Four of the teacher-participants believed that grade retention was an effective practice to be utilized for students who were struggling academically as well as behaviorally. Polly stated, “It’s effective because it means to me that the child eventually finds success in the classroom.” Ginger felt it was effective, but it has to be a case- by- case situation. After students have struggled an entire year with the retention, they will have the opportunity to, “have a very positive outcome where they feel like they’re on the top of their class.” On the other hand, Stacey was not sure if it is effective. She shared, “I feel I do not know enough about retention.” On the same lines, Brenda said, “I am definitely someone that’s on the fence about whether retention is a positive practice or not.” Despite whether it is effective or not, Center School retained more students in the district than the other thirteen elementary schools.

Is It An Effective Practice?

In the practice of grade retention, all teacher-participants wanted to make the best
decision in holding their students back a year. Yet, there were some concerns regarding the practice. Brenda had a self-debate about whether the student would catch up naturally without interference? She said, "I still wonder if I didn't retain them, would they end up making the growth away?" Annie expressed, "I was concerned about the whole year of retention. I didn't want the students to be bored by the beginning of the year." Ginger stated, "Sometimes I check on retained students with current teachers so I can gauge if I need to change my way of thinking for other students." Even when teacher-participants hold a student back for a year, they are concerned about the child's success. "By having a student repeat the grade for another year, it does not guarantee that the student will not continue to struggle," Stacy explained. "They may be a slow learner." Brenda brought up the point that they may be a candidate for Special Education. "At this point, we retained them and delayed their entry into Special Education," expressed Brenda.

**Teachers Limited Knowledge of Research on Grade Retention**

With the decision to retain or not, all teacher-participants agreed that they had limited or no knowledge regarding the research on grade retention. Stacey shared, “No, I feel I don’t know a lot about it.” Also, she felt it was something that should be taught in undergraduate college classes or school professional development. “I feel like we didn’t really talk a lot about retention or anything like that,” she continued. Julie remembered reading about the emotional impact a student might experience at the secondary level. “I do not know enough about the research,” she stated. Polly shared the same feelings. “I have always heard it in a negative way that it turned kids off to school. I am not sure whether to agree or disagree.” Brenda expressed, “I have heard pros and cons about some of the research, but I haven’t read that myself. I think I’ve just heard that by word of mouth.”
CAN IT BE THE ONLY INTERVENTION?

Not all teacher-participants agreed that there are other options to grade retention. They concurred that it was essential to identify struggling students early in order to provide additional support to impact learning. They believed some interventions had been shown to be more effective than grade retention. Utilizing scientific research-based interventions has proven to be helpful. Also, building extra time into the school day such as after-school tutoring or intervention classes would be beneficial. In addition, exploring Special Education for students earlier instead of retaining is another alternative. All teacher–participants agreed that having systematic and evidence-based interventions to facilitate the academic and socioeconomic development of these students would be useful. Ginger stated, “Math is important, but Literacy plays an essential role for our students.” She felt that students not able to read by the third grade face significant academic hurdles and an increased risk of retention. Aligned to this thought is Julie’s statement, “Reading intervention programs should provide developmentally appropriate and one-on-one strategies to promote the reading skills of struggling students.” This practice would be beneficial as an evidence-based intervention. Polly expressed, “If done efficiently, it would assist the students in improving their reading skills and reducing grade retention.

Four teacher-participants agreed that extended-year program or an extended day, including summer school programs, could be another option to grade retention. Stacey discussed the extended learning opportunities that students had each day. "Yes, I use to teach in that program. You could keep the kids on track with their learning," she expressed. Annie said, "I taught summer school, and students made great growth and did not have to be retained after the four weeks." In addition to this, to promote specific academic intervention, Julie suggested
small group and one-on-one instruction at least for thirty- to- sixty minutes a day. "I have seen students make great gains after receiving the focused instruction," Julie replied. Polly’s beliefs aligned with Julie's. "Gaps in kids’ learning can be closed with a focused curriculum is directed their needs. We have interventionists who conduct these groups." The other two teacher-participants shared the opinion that despite the scientific research-based interventions, children can be retained. Ginger replied, "I have tried it all and didn't move them enough." Brenda stated, "These interventions are good, but if they are slow- learners, they will need to repeat the year to keep up."

A few teacher-participants expressed the need to incorporated Special Education into the regular education program. They felt creating a partnership and consistency between the two programs would serve as another effective intervention and it would ensure the success of students by having available resources at all levels. "Special Education did not support testing a student who was retained. They stated that was the intervention," said Annie. Brenda was surprised that there is not a bigger presence in the building in regards to Special Education. She believed, "Students need to be provided with effective interventions that pinpoint target deficiencies and build upon their strengths. Why can't Special Education assist us with this? Maybe we would not have to retain students." "Testing to determine the nature of the learning difficulty is sometimes necessary," expressed Polly. Based on the results of such testing, additional intervention, such as Special Education services, can be implemented to prevent students from being retained.

All teacher-participants who agreed that it would assist with maintaining students academic focus supported parental involvement. Stacey expressed, “Promoting parent involvement is an intervention that is effective. When kids are failing, I involve the parent
immediately.” Julie replied, “I have frequent communication with parents, especially to supervise homework, and to be active in school activities.” Annie stated, “A parent can support and promote learning if they are active.” Ginger believed, “It can make students and parents feel like a part of the school environment.”

SYNTHESIS OF THEMES

This chapter described results of the experiences of elementary teachers who have retained students in the primary grades. In synthesizing the themes, it is vital to draw the connection between the Social and Cultural Capital Theory as a framework throughout this study. The first theme was identified as It Is In The Blood. Teachers were encouraged to share information and details about themselves and their educational history. The purpose of these questions was to develop a good rapport with teacher-participants and set a positive tone for the remainder of the interview. Yet, as stated before, it was interesting to see it develop into a theme. The teacher-participants shared their desire to become teachers at an early age. It was powerful the statements that were made by teacher-participants. One teacher, Annie stated, “It must be in my blood,” as she referred to that fact that every member in her family were educators. This was true of all teacher-participants. Relatives within the families craved the path or served as role models for these teachers. They expressed their perceptions of the rewards of teaching as well as the joy of watching children make growth academically. Also, they took pride in knowing that they in some way have impacted the future. Teacher-participants were aware of the challenges of teaching as they described the curriculum as demanding and more rigorous for students, especially English Language Learners. In addition, there were budgetary cuts that left them with no paraprofessional or assistance in the classroom.
The second theme identified as This Is How We Do It. Here the teacher-participants went into full details of their experiences with grade retention. As they moved more in-depth in practice providing explicit information, the research question was slowly beginning to be answered. In addition, they described the role that the principal and parents played in this practice. It was revealed that it was basically a teacher’s decision to hold a student back for another school year.

The third theme was identified as Looking Into the Mirror. Teacher-participants reflected on earlier statements in the interviews they made to gain a clearer understanding or deeper meaning of the phenomenon. They reflected on individual experiences of retention and specific issues that caused the retention. All teacher-participants agreed that grade retention was a useful practice. They questioned the practice and shared their concerns as being the right thing for their students. They could not understand why they did not know much about the topic and had a desire to review the research on grade retention.

The final theme was Can It Be The Only Intervention. Despite the fact that a few teacher-participants did not agree that there are other options to grade retention, some did. They believed some interventions could be more effective than grade retention, such as using scientific research-based interventions. Also, building extra time into the school day, such as after-school tutoring or intervention classes could be useful. In addition, exploring Special Education for students earlier instead of retaining was another alternative, and all teacher participants agreed that parental support would assist with maintaining students’ academic focus.

REFLEXIVITY
Reflexivity was an essential process within this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study that explored elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention. It allowed me to revisit my identity as a student, researcher, practitioner, and change agent to determine if there were any shift. In addition, it was an opportunity to share my desired outcome utilizing the data and making a transition towards implications of the study.

This study has taken me out of my “narrow range of experience” and helps me to understand experiences from several viewpoints and scenarios (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695). Teacher-participants shared and communicated their stories about grade retention. On the other hand, to be reflexive required the scholarly practitioners to “think from within experiences”, and “turn or reflect back upon the mind itself” (Robertson, 2000, p. 304). As a reflexive-minded practitioners, I had to ask myself, deeper questions than reflection such as why did this happened and how to improve it next time?

As a student, I saw a shift in my positionality. It was important that my positionality did not reflect on biases that may have crept into the study. Yet, I know it was not possible to limit bias. The topic was too near to my heart as a former elementary principal and one who witnessed the effects of grade retention on all students’ performance, especially students who are African-American and Hispanic. Despite this, the interview questions that were presented to the teacher–participants were strong enough to minimize the personal biases. In addition, acknowledging the biases, how teachers select students to retain shifted my positionality. I regret not taking the time to assess teachers' needs and understand their experiences, which would have limited anxiety among the staff. In most cases the grade retention was purposeful, using data to support the decision as well as evidence-based intervention. I can understand teacher-participants’ need to hold a student back if they are not meeting specific benchmarks.
Yet, as an educator, it appeared that other options could have been utilized because referring to the research, retained students could be future dropouts (Jimerson, 2001). This has always resonated in my mind forcing me to find other interventions to improve skills.

As a researcher, my passion for this topic can innately seem to be biased. It forced me to be careful not to allow my personal attachment to push me to “jump to the conclusion rather than arrive at a conclusion after methodical scholarly work,” (Machi & McEvoy, 2009, p. 19) while conducting the research. The literature review allowed me to obtain great knowledge to support my positionality, which did not shift. I still see grade retention to be an ineffective practice. Teacher-participants agreed that they were not familiar with the research on grade retention. This is essential information to know in order to make an informed decision about grade retention. It is vital to continue to bring this topic to the light and go to the next level of research of hearing students’ voices and the impact that retain has made in their lives. This would be powerful research.

As a practitioner, my positionality shifted. It was essential to compile research about grade retention. Yet, the process opened up opportunities to evolve from a passive role of a scholar where I have obtained a great amount of information through the research process. Now, I understand the importance of putting that knowledge into action. I can be an advocate for retained students as well as provide professional development for educators. In addition, joining professional organizations that could assist with displaying this research to further in different forums.

As a change agent, my positionality did not shift. I will continue to help students in need. Yet, what did shift was my need to inform educators as well as other administrators. The research is clear that grade retention is not an effective practice. Yet, the need to speak out for
children is essential. Grade retention has been used because teachers thought there were no other options. The importance of keeping the light shining on this topic is imperative because too many students are being retained to its detriment especially student of color (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

An importance purpose of the study was for me to have teacher-participants connect with their experiences and use the data to find ways to discover a balance that reinforce their love for their students and strengthen the desire to support them to grow as learners. The essence of their story shaped implications and recommendations for future research.
Chapter V – Implications

The findings of this Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study illuminated teacher-participants’ experiences with grade retention. The research question was: What are the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention? Four themes were found from this IPA study. The first theme, It Is In The Blood allowed the teacher-participants an opportunity to communicate personal information. It shared that relatives were one of the reasons they became teachers stating, "it was in the blood." The second theme was This Is How We Do It. A portrayal of teacher-participants experiences with grade retention was shared. The third theme was identified as Looking Into The Mirror. In order to comprehend the phenomenon, teacher-participants were given a chance to reflect on their previous statements. The fourth theme was Can It Be The Only Intervention? There was an articulated need for alternatives in exchange for grade retention. Data was collected and analyzed from the sixty-minute interviews of each teacher-participant. This last chapter, findings are discussed, and research implications, as well as future research avenues, are offered.

There were interesting findings revealed in this study in this paragraph. The two theoretical frameworks, Social and Cultural Capital Theories helped support the themes that derived from the data utilizing Bourdieu’s (1986) social networks which connected teacher – participants to stakeholders in the study. There is a large population of Hispanic students in the school which was approximately 70% of the school; it was difficult to determine if institutionalize racism impacted the climate and teacher-participants decision to retain. It was important to note that approximately 90% of the students retained at Center Elementary School
were Hispanic. Therefore, this is an area to review in the future. In addition, teachers-
participants supported grade retention despite the research conducted in the literature review. The research clearly demonstrated the harmful effects of grade retention (Shepard, 1989; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008).

**FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Two theoretical frameworks informed this study: Social and Cultural Capital Theories. These theories provided a consistent lens on the study of the experiences of elementary teachers with grade retention as essential themes emerged from the data.

**Social Capital Theory.** Bourdieu’s (1986) theory was formed around the central idea of social networks have values (Bourdieu, 1986). Social Capital Theory was measured with the data from the interviews of teacher-participants. It addressed the extent of social networks of trust and shared expectations between teachers and students, parents and teachers, and administrator and teachers. By examining experiences from teachers' points of view, it became apparent what they value, and it allowed an opportunity to dig deeper into why they selected grade retention.

There displayed a rich description of social networks that adhere to Bourdieu (1986), as teachers connected with students. Several teacher–participants had family members who were educators. Teacher-participants expressed love for children and a desire to make a difference in their lives powered their pursuance of teaching. Teacher-participants shared a desire to connect with their students so they can meet future success. They stated that grade retention served the primary purpose of getting a student back on track academically. Also, teacher-participants valued the relationship with teaching and their students.
Teachers and parents were viewed through this lens. Teachers at Center Elementary School valued the working relationship they had with families. There was a firm belief that parents respected and supported school decisions, programs and activities. Teacher-participants described the school climate as a positive and caring environment. A majority of the parents as explained by teacher-participants accepted the practice of having their child repeat a year of the same grade. They felt the teachers knew what was best for the child. Only one parent fought against the retention, but at the end, he had agreed to the recommendation to hold the child back. Meisels & Liaw’s (1993) research explained the vital role that parents play in practice. Parents' role is to ensure that every step has been taken in regards to their child and the possible retain. The Center School teachers used Scientific Research-based Interventions (SRBI) to add to the struggling student. Yet, parents were not involved in the process until the discussion of retention was introduced. In other words, parents were not given alternatives or options to the retention. Parents trusted and valued teachers’ recommendation without questioning the effectiveness. Smith & Shepard’s (1987) research displayed various interventions that parents should request to ensure success for the child. There are the following:

- Individualized instructions: a program is created for the individual student's style of learning which include a home assistance program where parents assist and monitor students process at home.

- Tutoring: a service outside of the school day that draws attention to the area of concern throughout the year.

- Creating smaller class size especially in the primary years. This improves learning for all students not only the struggle students
• Alternative educational instruction that provides opportunities for more project-based and hands-on learning.

• Involvement of Pupil Personnel Services: to provide support throughout the child’s school career.

• Postpone academic testing that leads to retention: Some testing may be helpful in identifying the needs of the student. However, it could be the determining factor for grade retention.

Throughout the interviews, the networking between teacher-participants and parents were more informative of their concerns and thoughts about retention. Parents were not included as a truly valued partner in the practice. In addition, if the parent accepted grade retention. Parents should work with the teacher to ensure the child had a considerably different school experience from the previous year. If retention is selected, the extra year should not be a repeat of the preceding year, but it should be individualized in such a way that it contributes to the child's future success (Witmer, West, & Hughes, 2004).

Research demonstrated the essential role that administrators place in the practice of grade retention (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Often, administrators/principals allow teachers to form the decision to retain (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). In this study, the school administrator served as a supporter of the teacher-participants in retaining as a student. Teacher-participants expressed their admiration for this principal and felt he allowed them to do what they thought was best for the student. They believed, he trusted and treated them like professionals. There were no conflicts about the practice whenever students were discussed at a team meeting. Though he had the power to reverse any teachers’ choice or to require additional data, he did
not question their reasons. He met with parents to assist teacher-participants with the
conference about retaining for a child.

At this point, it is essential to share that teacher-participants often discussed
struggling students with colleagues. At Center School, teachers' social networks helped produce
measurable data displayed in teachers' attitudes and behaviors about grade retention. It was an
acceptable practice shared among colleagues. As stated before, researchers expressed that
norms and beliefs held by teachers could support or hinder efforts to improve teaching and
learning in schools (Fox & Wilson, 2015; Penuel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). They work as a
team to review data and render support with grade retention. The final decision was placed
solely on the classroom teacher.

Cultural Capital Theory. The Cultural Capital like Social Capital showed several
variables. In this study, the framework allowed teachers' to explore their experiences with grade
retention by recognizing students' racial and financial status (Bourdieu, 1983). There are four
hundred and nine students at Center Elementary School. The demographic at this current time
is the following: 4.0% Asian, 6.7% Black or African American, 70.8% Hispanic/Latino, and
15% White, non-Hispanic. Also, 82% of the four hundred and nine students receive reduced or
free lunch. In addition, 49.9% of the student populations were English Language Learners. It is
evident that Hispanic/Latino was the majority in the school. There is a more significant number
or free and reduced students. This data made it difficult to determine if race or economic status
played the role of grade retention at the school. Some concerns derived from the data.

Utilizing the institutionalized state within the Cultural Capital afforded the study to
explore teachers-participants experiences with grade retention and the disproportionate number
of Hispanic students held back. Researchers believed that teachers form better and more in-
depth relationships with students from a prominent status culture (Mills, 2008). Teachers provided more attention to the perception that the prominent status cultures are more intelligent or gifted than students who do not possess Cultural Capital (Lipman, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Mills, 2008). In this study, the race concerns were not determined. With the large population of Hispanic/Latino students, it is apparent that they are measured by culturally biased standards supporting White, middle-class students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Another concern was teacher-participants in many cases referred to the students as coming from needy families, given the perception that due to their economic status students are more likely to be retained.

**Disconnection to Literature Review**

With the vast body of research on grade retention, the continuous use of the practice displayed examples of lack of communication concerning research and practice in this study. All of the teacher-participants stated that they were not familiar with current research which was concerning. Their reflections shared the support of grade retention especially in the earlier grades as they noted the perceived benefits of retention. They were not aware of the impact of this decision such as student dropout in later grades, students not being provided the resources to succeed, and students of color being identified more than their White peers in this practice.

The literature review provided research that indicated teachers were not familiar or updated with the research conducted on grade retention (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). This was true of the teacher-participants of Center School as they shared in the interview. Despite the negative results of grade retention, this practice was continued. It was evident that this was a familiar practice embedded in the culture of the school. In fairest, the literature also stated this as an area of limitation. There was not enough research on teachers’ experiences with grade
retention. The study was to provide a more in-depth understanding. It more probing is necessary to get to the real reason the practice of grade retention does not match the research.

Teacher-participants focused were on students’ academic performance and maturity as reasons to retained students. Research does not support the reasons in this case as well (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). From the lack of review of research, teacher-participants missed the vital feedback, which was how students performed academically as they moved through school (Smith & Shepard, 1987; Witmer, West, & Hughes, 2004). Their focus was basically on the elementary experience and gains students made progressing to the next level. The research found that academically, elementary school into high school students fell behind. By the age of sixteen, they continued to decline academically and dropped out of school (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Some teacher-participants believed that children mature and develop school readiness along with physiological unfolding. However, research showed that children are teachable if the program is adapted to fit that child's individual needs (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008; Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). As stated before, the reasons for grade retention is not supported by research.

The practice of grade retention at Center School gave the appearance of a school accepting accountable for a problem and upholding standards. This is commendable and was evident in the interviews. It may have neglected the primary cause of a student's failure. Teacher-participants’ reflections demonstrated the need for other option in place of grade retention. Therefore, the resource may not have been reviewed. An example could be the many students retained at Center School eventually qualified for Special Education later in their school (Tanner & Galis, 1997; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004).
As stated prior, Center School has an unusual demographic for the school district where 70% of the students in the school are Hispanic/Latino with 15% White and the other 15% was made up among Asian and African American students. However, it is essential to emphasize the research support the disproportionate number of students of color identified for retention in comparison to their White peers (Range, Pijanowski, Holt, & Young, 2012). This is due to the fact that a majority of students retained at by these teacher-participants were Hispanic/Latino. Teacher-participants were not aware of this dilemma.

The literature review and the study shed a bright light on grade retention. It demonstrated that teacher-participants were not acquainted with grade retention research. Therefore, they were not aware of the impact of this decision on students in the later grades. Also, it displayed other options to retention to provide students with the needed resources. Besides, it brought to the light the possibility that Hispanic/Latino students are being identified more than their White peers. On the other hand, their experiences provided a foundation for future work in this area.

**Future Implications**

The data from this research paper provided an opportunity to make implications for further research on the topic of grade retention. However, it revealed missing elements that could enhance the current data even further. It is essential to examine in the last chapter research implications as well as future research avenues that are proposed.

As discussed earlier in the research, teachers play a significant role in retaining a student (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Sad to say, the research about teachers promoting grade retention remains underdeveloped. (Hossler, Ziskin, & Gross, 2009). Lacks of teacher’s voice in the practice of grade retention currently exist. However, this study explored teachers’
experiences as well as voices. At first, teachers in the same district with me were listed as a limitation. There was a small probability that teacher-participants would respond dishonestly in order to make a good impression (Briscoe, 2005). This did not happen. Teacher-participants were professionals; spoke freely and boldly expressed their opinions. Their experiences were essential in understanding the various reasons for having a student held back a grade. Continuing to hear teachers’ voices would influence the next level of work on grade retention.

The theoretical framework of Social Capital Theory helped establish social networks among the stakeholders in the study. The relationship between teacher and students as well as teacher and parents displayed the importance of what teacher-participants valued in this connection. Social Capital Theory assisted with the outlining of the things valued and the social connections. Using Social Capital Theory, as a framework would be essential for future implication as it may go deeper into the practice.

**Areas of Concern**

Overall, this qualitative study used descriptive data to developed themes in order to answer the research question: What are the experiences of Elementary teachers with grade retention? This was helpful and could be used to further or add to the research. However, there were a few areas that were missed in the study that could improve the data for future use. This would increase the number of teacher-participants by changing the incorporation of multiple elementary schools, utilizing Cultural Capital Theory to provide a more in-depth outline.

**Increase the Number of Teacher-Participants**

As stated earlier, there were six teacher–participants that qualified for the study. They were white females with five to twenty-five years of teaching experience. In the future, it
would be beneficial to increase the number of teacher-participants to gather a boarder understanding of their perception of grade retention. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study. An IPA approach served the purpose of offering insights into teachers’ experiences with grade retention, in the attempt to make sense of this phenomenon (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). The teacher-participants were too similar in many ways. For future study, a Case Study would be considered as an effective method. Case study research would provide an in-depth, detailed study of a small group of teacher-participants. It is still qualitative, which allows for a narrative description of behavior or experience (Yazan, 2015). Case study research involving grade retention would be able to explore and describe a phenomenon. The main purpose of Case study research will be to narrow the focus, provide more and a higher level of detail, and it merges both objective and subjective data to attain an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2013; Yazan, 2015). Yet, due to the in-depth nature of the data, it is not possible to conduct the research on a large scale, which is not necessary. Besides, it is important not only to increase the number of teacher-participants but also to add males as well as teachers from different cultural/racial backgrounds. It would be interesting to examine a male teacher’s perception of grade retention. Would a teacher for a different cultural or racial backgrounds view holding a student back a year differently?

**Incorporation Of Multiple Elementary Schools**

The study site took place in a public, elementary school located in northern Fairfield County of Connecticut. There are fourteen elementary schools in this area. The next area to growth upon would be incorporating more schools in the study. It is not suggested to use all fourteen schools. Adding two more schools for a total of three may provide another lens to this topic. Currently, this study used teachers from the same school because of this; it is possible
that the school climate or expectation may have impacted their acceptant of grade retention (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). Each school culture varies according to beliefs generated by the stakeholders (Pollard, 1993). Therefore, by allowing multiple schools to participate there is a possibility that the results may be more abundant and more profound by the different perspectives and experiences of the teachers. Also, multiple schools support the Case Study methodology that was shared in prior. IPA was able to ask questions of who, what, where, how much and how many. A Case Study, on the other hand, may dig deeper into answering questions of how or why: not surface responses (Creswell, 2013). It is generally utilized in the process of collecting in-depth data in a real-life context allowing to compare the various teachers from different schools (Bernard & Bernard, 2012).

**Practical Use of Cultural Capital Theory**

The Cultural Capital similar to Social Capital displayed variables like race, class, gender, age and more to mention. It was used to assist in framing teachers’ experiences with grade retention and the students of color who filled the desks from various races, genders, and financial status (Bourdieu, 1983). Though both frameworks were utilized in this study, Cultural Capital could have been used to a deeper level. It was merely surface usage. As stated before, Center School enrollment was four hundred and nine students. The demographic was: 4.0% Asian, 6.7% Black or African American, 70.8% Hispanic/Latino, and 15% White, non-Hispanic. The majority was Hispanic/Latino students with 70.8%. It could not be determined that teacher-participants in this study retain more Hispanic/Latino students since they were the majority. It is clear to state that teacher-participants did not retain the White student who makes up 15% of the school population.
Cultural Capital Theory as a framework at a surface level investigated teachers' understanding of the consequences of retention due to the number of students from a diverse background. Despite the research stating, a larger number of students from diverse backgrounds are retained (Yosso, 2005), this framework did not effectively help teacher-participants construct their reality about the impact of grade retention on certain populations of students more than others (Yosso, 2005). The belief that schools are a mirror of society, therefore, racial bias reflects what is rooted in our society (Ravitch, 2010). Students are measured alongside culturally biased standards that reinforce White, middle-class students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Utilizing the Cultural Capital Theory was a strong framework for this research as it explores teachers’ experiences with grade retention. Due to the demographics, it was hard to determine the depth of this framework.

**Teaching and Research**

Throughout this study, it was apparent that teacher-participants were not familiar with the research on grade retention. There was a unique relationship among teaching and research. They should be connected, yet it is often ignored. Research influences teaching (and vice versa), but the divide between the two never meet in the study. Teacher-participants did not seem to be bothered by the fact that the research clearly demonstrates the ineffective nature of grade retention. They continued to utilize this practice. It is essential to continue to provide an opportunity for teachers to learn using research. This is an excellent time to give teachers a scholarly journal or to develop a committee or club to review the research on a weekly basis.

**Reciprocity With Teacher-Participants**

Teacher-participants shared valuable time to further the research in this study. Therefore, it was considerate and necessary to display reciprocity (Robertson, 2000; Trainor &
Bouchard, 2013). It is vital to acknowledge the establishment of a reciprocal relationship with participants (Robertson, 2000). As stated before, reciprocity should not be utilized in the sense of "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013, p. 987). It was more a moral stance making it necessary for this qualitative study. Reciprocity supported the accountability and transparency between researcher, teacher-participants and academic community (Edwards, Sebba, and Rickinson, 2007). Henceforth, reciprocity was developed throughout the research process in a variety of ways. During the interviews, teacher-participants were made to feel comfortable by inquiring about their well being as they shared information (Robertson, 2000). Also, teacher-participants had opportunities to review transcripts, data collection, and data analysis for accuracy (Ary et al., 2006; Morse, Barrett, Mayna, Olson, & Spier, 2002; Trainor, & Bouchard, 2013). Shared the findings directly with teacher-participants and listened carefully to their responses and feedbacks helped to create a reciprocal relationship (Morse, Barrett, Mayna, Olson, & Spier, 2002).

District and school administrators were included in the reciprocal relationship. They should be acknowledged as they allowed me the opportunity to conduct this research in the district. Providing a series of professional development for the staff and the school district on grade retention added a reciprocal relationship.

**Direct Application**

In completing this study, it was vital to explore the practical application of the theory. By examining various forums in which to heighten the awareness of the ineffective practice of grade retention should be explored.

**Knowledge Is Power**
The best for students is at the center of each teachers’ heart. They would not deliberately engage in practices that are harmful to students. Knowledge about the research is power to change a student’s life. Unfortunately, teachers in this study had a distorted view of the practice of grade retention. Their belief that it was helpful unintentionally exposed students to academic, social, emotional and behavioral difficulties they may not have experienced. A lack of knowledge of vast research about retention cannot be an excuse to declare a practice with dangerous consequences for children in their care. Therefore, different approaches must take place to ensure that the research is respected and students are no longer placed in this practice.

Here are several approaches to relate educators at all level and institutions. Utilizing Social Media to connect with educators would be an effective way to provide pertinent information about grade retention. A Blog or Facebook has the potential to open up the great discussion, and hopefully inform educators at each level. Also, providing time to review the research in study group forum would allow educators to obtain the necessary knowledge to move students forward. Besides, I would like to conduct workshops and presentations to inform educators and train them so they can become advocates for students as well.

I am a firm believer that educators of future educators can change the practice of grade retention. At the college or university level, I am willing to work with professors to assist students to recognize these beliefs and construct new knowledge about grade retention. Pre-service teachers enrolled in some Development of Early Childhood Programs would benefit from this knowledge. Students would be exposed to a class that will explore various teaching strategies and curriculum models as they learned about alternatives to grade retention. This would fit well as new teacher examine their student through a constructivist lens seeing children
as active learners with different learning styles, make them less likely to label children as retained.

**Professional Organizations That Value Education**

I will offer workshops to the local National Education Association (NEA). It is the largest organization in the United States serving professional employee. The main committed and focus is to promote the cause of public education. This would be effective when communicating the impact of grade retention. Also, providing workshops to the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who works to guarantee students of color obtains an excellent public education, training them to be contributing member of society. Hopefully, the research would motivate them to assist in the educating of the family about the misuse of grade retention. Also, attending a conference or maybe in the future joining the American Educational Research Association (AERA) would benefit me in my pursuit to make grade retention a serious topic in education. This organization concern is to improve the educational process utilizing practical application of research results.

**An Advocate for Future Students**

As this study concludes, mix feelings are surfacing. Parents entrust their children to us to educate. Therefore, it is imperative that I strive to assist educators to learn more about the impact of grade retention especially those in the classroom. There can be no more excuses to promulgate the practice of grade retention, which has serious consequences for children. By completing a literature review, my positionality and position as an administrator, I am positioned to be a strong advocate for students. I teach educators, which gives me an opportunity to provide my pre-service to new staff and professional development to others.
providing all grade retention research. My hope is changing the practice presenting my findings at professional conferences and in professional journals.

As stated before, the teacher-participants in this study loved their students and would do anything to assist them and their families. I am deeply uncomfortable with the lack of discomfort shown by teacher-participants when it came to the topic of grade retention. Sad to say, I am profoundly disturbed because I also traveled this path and retained students in my school, as I believed it to be in their best interests at the time. There is no way to change the past and what I did to those former students. I think of Gandhi's saying, “Be the Change You Want To See.” Therefore, I will be that change agent to ensure that I advocate for these students and trying change the way in which future teachers approach the practice of grade retention.
Notification of IRB Action

Date: February 12, 2018  IRB #: CPS17-12-23

Principal Investigator(s): Billye Sankofa-Waters
                        Edie Thomas

Department: Doctor of Education
            College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
         Northeastern University

Title of Project: Exploring Elementary Teachers Belief about Grade Retention

Participating Sites: Morris Street Elementary School permission in file

Informed Consent: One (1) unsigned consent

As per CFR 45.46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: FEBRUARY 11, 2019

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B

Dr. Salvatore Pascarella,
Superintendent
63 Beaver Brook Road
Danbury, CT 06811

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Pascarella,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at one of our elementary schools. I am currently enrolled in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, MA and am in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. It is entitled Exploring Elementary Teachers Belief About Grade Retention. Educators often face tough decisions to retain students who do not meet academic standards for promotion. The purpose of this study is to learn more about elementary teachers’ experiences with grade retention.

I hope the administration will allow me to recruit six - ten teachers from one school. They will participate in a one-hour interview. I cannot ensure anonymity, but can do my best to ensure confidentiality when interviewing teacher-participants. All responses will be used for the study only and will be kept confidential with no respondent being identified individually. Participation for teachers is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn from the study at any time without any penalty.

Please consider allowing your elementary teachers participation in this study. If you have questions about this study or are interested in knowing the results, please contact me by phone at (203) 770-4212 or by email at thomas.ed@husky.neu.edu. My dissertation chairperson is Dr. Billye Sankofa-Waters and she may be contacted by email at b.sankofawaters@northeastern.edu.

If you agree, kindly sign and return the consent form through email giving me permission to conduct this study at an elementary school in your district.

Respectful Submitted,

Edie Thomas
Doctoral Student
Northeastern University
Approved by:

DR. GM Bianculli  Sep 7

Print name          Title

Signature          Date

10/15/12
APPENDIX C- Recruitment Letter

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to extend an invitation to participate in a proposed study as I am pursing my Doctorate in Education at Northeastern University. The study is entitled, “Exploring Elementary Teachers Beliefs About Grade Retention.”

Eligibility to participate in this project are the following: you are a teacher in the primary grades (K-3), taught a minimal of two years, have retained a student, and familiar with scientific research based interventions. If you wish to volunteer to participate, please email me at thomas.ed@husky.neu.edu and I will provide next steps. To participate in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate. In addition, anonymity cannot be guaranteed but I will do your best to ensure confidentiality. Therefore, interviews will not take place in my school or during working hours to increase confidentiality.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of participation and look forward to working with you in the future. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me. Please make sure you do not contact me at any of my work contacts in the Danbury Public Schools as that would be a breach of confidentiality. Any emails sent to any email address other than my thomas.ed@husky.neu.edu email address will be considered a violation of Northeastern University IRB and must be deleted with no response. Again, I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Edie Thomas
Northeastern Doctoral Student

IRB# CPS17-12-23
Approved: 2/12/18
Expiration Date: 2/11/19
APPENDIX D- Consent Form

Northeastern University, Department of: Education (EdD Doctorate Program)

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Billye Sankofa-Waters, Edie Thomas

Title of Project: Exploring Elementary Teachers Belief About Grade Retention

Request to Participate in Research

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of teachers’ use of grade retention in an urban elementary school. The definition for grade retention is a process in which a teacher does not promote a student to the next grade level but has the student repeat the same grade for two consecutive years. Teachers are the ones who make the recommendation to move the student forward or to keep them behind. Therefore, it is vital to distinguish and comprehend their beliefs and knowledge about retention.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project. The study will take place at any location you choose, with the exception of the researcher’s workspaces. The interview will take about sixty minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to share your experience with grade retention.

There are very few foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. Interviews will not be conducted in the researcher’s workspaces and none will be done during normal school hours. Therefore, any risk of coercion or losses of confidentiality are lessened.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about the impact of grade retention for elementary school students.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate in the study. Also, you can refuse to answer any question that is uncomfortable to you. It is important to note that if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Edie Thomas by email: thomas.ed@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Billye Sankofa-Waters, the Principal Investigator by email: b.sankofawaters@northeastern.edu.
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 260 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for your reference.

Thank you,
Edie Thomas
APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This interview protocol was based on the following Research Question: **What are the experiences of Elementary teacher with grade retention?** Social and Cultural Capital Theories shaped the questions.

1. **Focused Life History:** This set of questions will require the teacher-participants to share their personal history in connection to the topic to present time.
   - Why did you want to become a teacher?
   - Do you have other educators in your family?
   - How many years have you taught in elementary school?
   - What are some of the rewards you feel are a part of teaching in early childhood?
   - What are some of the challenges you feel are a part of teaching in primary classes?
   - Have you ever retained a student?
   - Approximately how many students have you retained?
   - What were the demographics or subgroups of retained students?
   - What is the protocol for retaining students?
   - Are you familiar with the current research on grade retention?

2. **Details of the Experience:** During this section, a detailed description of their experiences with grade retention at the primary level will be discussed.
   - What are your thoughts about retaining children?
   - Can you describe an experience in detail of when you retained a student?
   - What factors led to your retention decision?
   - Can you describe how you use research-based intervention within your classroom to assist this student?
   - How did you communicate this decision with parents?
   - How did the parent(s) respond?
   - How did the school administration react?
   - Do you keep up with the student’s progress after they have been retained?
   - How are the students moving through their school years?

3. **Reflection on the Meaning:** These questions will allow teachers to reflect on prior statements made in the interview in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.
   - Do you ever feel if you made the “appropriate” decision to retain a child?
   - Do you feel there were other options?
   - Have parents ever called to discuss their child after they have been retained?
   - How do your colleagues describe their experiences retaining a student or their positions about retaining and their experiences?
   - From your perspective, what factors caused the retention of the students in which you retained?
   - What were the racial/cultural backgrounds of these students?
   - In your experience, has grade retention proven to be an effective practice?
   - Is there anything that I have not asked that you would like to add?
APPENDIX F

(Date)

Dear Participant,

Your participation and willingness to share your experience with grade retention has been valuable and much appreciated. As a final request, I would like for you to read the transcripts from our interviews to verify accuracy. If you find any discrepancies, please notify me immediately.

Thank you again for your participation.
Edie Thomas

________ I have read the transcripts from each interview and verify the accuracy of the documents.

________ I have read the transcripts and have discrepancies with the accuracy of the documents.

Please sign below with your assigned pseudonym:
APPENDIX G- Description of Teacher-Participants

Table 1

*Description of Teacher-Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of Students Retained</th>
<th>Familiar with Research-based Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reference


doi: 10.1080/10573560903396967


Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. (2001). Practical research planning and design. Merrill Prentice Hall: Columbus, OH.


