

## Educational History Notes on Primary School Retention: A Children's Risk and Adversities Literature Review

Randle Sloan-Toraño

Ph. D. German Historical Association, Der Verband der Historiker und Historikerinnen Deutschlands

**Abstract:** Academic primary school grade retention generates greater risks and adversity than benefits to students worldwide as a cross-examination of the educational history reviewed since pre WWI reveals. Naturally some countries and research scientists argue otherwise based on social complexities, national or state teachers employment trends and economic or political strategic choices. In general corrective interventions to children's academic failure, students' sensitivity, crime, health, religion, belongingness amidst multiculturalism, sociological and psychological factors account for multifaceted unsolved and ongoing dilemmas in developed and developing economies. The heterogeneity controversy alone in numerous countries contributes to economic expenses that significantly threatens children's well-being. The double digit grade retention data in developed and developing worldwide economies serves as a warning to policymakers of the need for betterments and recurring assessment of grading and underperformance. This paper's objective seeks to review and interpret; -what level of exposure to risk and adversity from underperformance corrective activities to children is harmless or beneficial? -why does the pursuit of non-promotion as a remedy for a lack of certain levels of knowledge acquisition remain as an option? -And, will a children's first approach as participants and recipients benefit students by removing risk and advancing educational efficiency. Multimedia technologies serve educational systems to address underperformance, knowledge acquisition while narrowing the gap between retention and any form of automatic promotion.

**Keywords:** Belongingness, Children's first approach, Crime, Discretionary policies, Diversity, Policymakers, Failure, Protectionism.

### INTRODUCTION

This history based study examines educational research corresponding to primary school grade retention<sup>1</sup> which is not a single phase controversy where grade retention is a cure. Interpreting questions of adequate implementation of educational provisions considering all young students' long term future and well-being remains a work in progress. In this sense, overcoming retention misconceptions, complying with regional and national educational objectives, assessing advantages and disadvantages and analyzing psychological tendencies of students considering that retention side-effects may not surface for years is a never-ending task. As policymakers fine-tune resources, some students' well-being and futures are allowed directly or indirectly to endure risk and adversities. Consequently, students face within their own levels of understanding how to assimilate, assess grading failure and grade retention within their own cultural environment unknowing of lifelong repercussions. Yet, the level of student ownership of knowledge acquisition, grade retention, crime, health and lifelong consequences is a diversified field fashioned after traditional norms. Consequently, the curative effects of risk and adversities to migrant children

from retention are based on educational targets with inconsistent child to child unknowns. In this sense, risk mitigation to improve national educational and political targets are additionally affected by critical discretionary exclusions of migrants. Furthermore, highly motivated educators' availability, program choice, adaptation, delivery and success depends on budgets subjected to social, economic, regional and specialized pedagogical criteria. But, -do they remove risk and adversity to all children?

This historical chronology of documented literature examines grade retention, to review past and current trends, challenges, educational goals and results. A *children's first approach* might help in understanding the why and how a non-advantageous retention policy is continuously reinvented. This paper aims to identify and interpret; -why do advanced economies carry double digit primary grade retention and non-promotion considering all the negative implications attached to such a predicament? -how does double digit grade retention equate to an educational program's failure when implemented for success? And, -is the financial standards of double digit grade retention countries favoring selectivity advantages to knowledge, political, social or financial benefits for the selected?

We explore these questions to analyze within a scale of periodization, consequences and results

<sup>1</sup>In this paper primary-school-retention, school-retention, retention, grade-retention, grading systems and non-promotion generally are used interconnectedly. This chronology seeks to facilitate a history-based perspective of published works pointing out key educational failures.

from specific research choices. That said, educational authorities, for example; in the EU schools have tools to mitigate underperformance where teachers, school principals, social workers and psychologists can intervene on a one on one selective approach to systematically assist students with a wide range of pedagogical and interactive tools and programs. On the other hand the weaponization of the educational authorities in particular cities, states and nations leads to uncertainty when testing or redirecting the limits of national educational discretionary and strategic choices. Under the current political direction in the USA the United States Department of Education is undergoing a process leading to a congressional abolition.

When educational content is in line or out of line with political and national trends it becomes a confrontational subject full of inconsistencies. In such cases the redundant dialogue of educational discretionary choices with an extensive history of national protectionism perpetuates unknown risk and adversities to children.

### **History Notes on Educational Trends, Belongingness, Segregation and Decolonization**

To understand weaponized education and comprehend why a developed democratic nation tests and redirects nationhood at will let's revisit a chapter in US history. To engage with nationhood and belongingness. K. Tsianina Lomawaima & Teresa T. McCarty (2025) takes us back to the late nineteenth Century South Dakota native nations of the region:

*“The “civilized” nation assumes that its right to dispossess native nations of land went hand in hand with a responsibility to “uplift” them through an erase-and-replace regimen: Replace heritage languages with English, replace “paganism” with Christianity, replace economic, political, social, legal and aesthetics institutions. Erase and replace everything. Mission and federal “Indian schools” were established as laboratories for a grand experiment in cultural cleansing”. (p. 1957).*

This *erase-and-replace regimen* today has a thousand faces where none is a pretty one. Yet, all such faces dissipate throughout educational practices re-born into the transformation of local, state or national discretionary ordinances. In (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2025) native nations went from being owners of their lands, languages, heritage and institutions *into a grand experiment* to become hired-help serving the interest of the very same authority that had destituted them of

property, rights and antiquities. In (Sloan 2018, 2021, 2025) the very same colonial fundamentals with a different face were used to discard language, origin, and ownership for the benefits of colonial institutions, explorers and Kings. Naturally it should be considered that there are no shortcuts when children's risk and adversities are on the horizon. Jean Schroedel & Artur Aslanian (2025) adds to this chronology of Native American nations contemporary perspective:

*“Native Americans were statutorily excluded from voting and holding office anywhere in the state until the 1940s and South Dakota continued prohibiting inhabitants in Todd, Shannon and Washabaugh Counties from voting until as late as 1974 and from serving in some elected offices until 1980”. (p. 311).*

The Montana Indian Studies Law was enacted in 1974 and it was repealed less than five years after. William W Thackeray, (1995):

*“Tribal leaders and social advocates from several other states, such as South Dakota, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, sought information about the law for their own jurisdictions. (p, 120), (...) the level of hostility, threatened violence, and even eruptions of violence that developed among the law's more radical opponents. (p, 121), (...) Particular reference was made to the separate and “unique psychological history” of Indian peoples, which could be “understood only by people who have either experienced or studied history” from an Indian point of view”. (p, 123).*

William W. Thackeray (1995) relevance is the history periodization of 1974 as a significant year involving legislation, voting rights and education with a clear separation between euro-natives, non-euro-natives, native-Americans and other legal racial classifications in the US. Native Americans serving in elected offices over the following 45-50 years since 1974 is further discussed in the following quote. Elise Blasingame, Eric R. Hansen & Richard C. Witmer, (2025):

*“We find no evidence that measures sponsored by Native American legislators are more likely to be signed into law, regardless of how their involvement in the bill sponsorship is measured. In fact, we find that substantive measures sponsored by Native legislators are less likely to pass”. (p. 318).*

This Native American subject is so important yet it needs little explanation to set a precedent. Such historical narratives are analogous to what

discretionary<sup>2</sup> choices can lead to any country. Over a hundred years later researchers study the process of colonization of the early Native American schools to assess not only yesterday's loss of tribal life but today's loss of political power. Those early stages of a colonial practice has led to other continuous prohibitions such as the basic voting rights or to hold public office as a political practice even today. (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2025; Schroedel & Aslanian, 2025; Blasingame, *et al.*, 2025). Current political trends prevent Native Americans from accomplishing their own independent goals. The American colonization concepts based on indoctrination and forced assimilation have quietly evolved over decades. The past decade has witnessed the reasoning and adaptations of political trends and complex scientific principles in a new light. Assessing misinformation, fake news, pseudoscience while separating educational redundancy, discretionary choices and political trends from children's education requires fact checking methods outside regional school norms. In this regard results are defined by information input and methodological extraction in search of specific verifiable output. The following Debi Khasnabis & Simona Goldin (2020) quote presents a conditioned element to recognize adding pain-upon-injury. In our history review we find that *poor children and families of color* may also be immigrants in refugee countries worldwide further exacerbating the educational trauma of belongingness:

*" (...) educators must be supported to recognize and challenge racist frames through which trauma is frequently interpreted and weaponized to injure, blame, and pathologize, in particular, poor children and families of color". (p. 54).*

In a wider context Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Syria, Afghanistan or other war zones families with children migrating to refugee nations may become targets of a weaponized education unaware of the practice within the receiving country. Worldwide in some regional school districts, political and social discretionary practices serve as a more traditional platform to exclude and segregate. Under such parameters how is the normalization of knowledge transfer delivering quality results for the benefit of all students. For such families with children in their early educational years in a receiving country the future is unpredictable.

<sup>2</sup> Discretionary choices and weaponized education serve similar values; this paper will utilize discretionary preceded or followed by an indicator.

Specifically families migrating from a developing country to a developed economic academic system face more demanding issues of adaptability.

Protecting children as discussed by Simona Goldin, Addison Duane & Debi Khasnabis (2021) refers to a far right normalization process of nations: *"As educators, we are individuals nested within school systems. Harnessing our abilities to identify and interrupt Whiteness is our collective responsibility". (p. 18).* The term *whiteness* in one country has an equalization term in another country to implement specific beliefs; in that sense a language of normalization emerges.

Marcelo Svirsky (2017) decolonization model applies beyond the Native American restoration models:

*"Once the method of settler colonisation is re-conceptualised, the redefinition of the method of decolonisation follows. Thus, decolonisation involves rendering ineffective the elimination of indigenous life and of shared life. This is how shared life becomes a political operation of resistance and not just an ideological horizon of visionaries". (p. 16).*

Throughout history many nations have been colonized, exploited and removed from their own culture, languages, traditions and pushed to extreme hardships; that is a fundamental truth. In a world perspective, struggling war zone victims have children being educated to become the future of their own ancestral lands or a new land they call home or in an endless land struggle. Independently of how belongingness and nationhood is proposed, children are faced with adversities as they depend on educational authorities to command and dispense security and equality for the right of a quality education. Ideally equality engages all political platforms as elements of a wider world of education that is all inclusive in quality and availability to all students. The protection of such rights should expand from the devastation and *scholasticide* in Gaza (Robert O. Smith 2019; Wassim Ghantous 2023; Dader, *et al.*, 2024) into authentic decolonization (Svirsky, 2017; Laenui, 2000; Wildcat, *et al.*, 2014) and *a political operation of resistance* leading; into a world dialogue to identify misinformation, indoctrination and far right consolidation movements of (Martha Pérez-Mugg, 2025; Timothy Messer-Kruse, 2024; Michael Hand & Nicholas C. Burbules, 2025; Genevieve Allaire-Duquette, 2025; Theresa J. Ambo & Steven M. Gavazzi, 2025). Such critical cases of geographical displacement and religious

conflicts coexist with violence leaving behind empty classrooms in ruins where the very young and older students *do not learn to interact*. In (Dader, *et al.*, 2024; p. 2) “*All Universities in Gaza have now been destroyed. This has had numerous consequences, from the destruction of culture, memory, and knowledge, to the prevention of the access of around 625,000 students to education*”. Naturally this ongoing chapter of contemporary Middle East history is the extreme result of a restitution plan gone wrong. Such Israeli-Palestinian conflict results are the long term ongoing consequences from the lack of EU political interventions; -to correct the failed intercultural restitution plan they originally promoted.

Problems with multiculturalism and decolonization models seem unavoidable as nationals at receiving countries worldwide rarely are in consensus regarding asylees, refugees or guest workers migrating into their country. In this sense, from the north Native Americans to the south Native Americans including the Central isthmus and the Caribbean there has been a long history of colonial exploitation, whereas currently they still face an even longer history of decolonization. Decolonization worldwide embodies a thousand faces and again none is a pretty one. At a national level cultural diversity, engagement or disengagement and/or decolonization models carry consequences and such consequences for most children start at primary schools.

Educating young students into a world of reason to understand multicultural nations allows students to identify for themselves the right path into a collective future of decision makers if given the opportunity. In a perfect world primary school education lays a road for future generations of clear minded and honest citizens; -but will that road ever be perfect?

### **International Studies on Grade Retention, Misfits, Fragility and Distortions**

Numerous international studies note that there is no real advantage to grade retention, (Shepard & Smith, 1985, 1988, 1990; Balow & Schwager, 1990; Brophy, 2006; Diris, 2017; Driessen, 2020; Martin, 2011; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999; Peixoto, *et al.*, 2016; Sherwood, 1993; Slavin & Madden, 1989; Stearns, *et al.*, 2007; Van Canegan, *et al.*, 2022).

In Van Canegan, *et al.*, (2022):

“Overall, the findings clearly indicate that grade retention is associated with a lower sense of belonging at school, confirming hypothesis 1 (H1). It seems that retainees do perceive themselves to be a misfit with their environment, because of being retained. (...) An important finding of this study is that grade retention seems to be most detrimental to retainees’ sense of belonging in contexts where this practice is the least common.” (p. 21).

The misfit and the sense of belonging in Van Canegan, *et al.*, (2022) is a cross-national topic which exists to various degrees in the school districts of numerous countries. Factors as to what is a classroom for nationals and their sense of belongingness and the same classroom associated with immigrant students have different levels of nationhood and performance. This stand-alone heterogeneity question in itself is overwhelming yet, we seek to interpret other associated educational components<sup>3</sup>. Belongingness becomes one of those thousand faces of the earlier colonial trends. Identity or ethnicity become factors leading to social exclusion or other educational obstacles as some children's stability is linked to migration, belongingness and multiculturalism within a receiving country's protectionist norms.

In König, *et al.*, (2012) the authors are faced with excluded aspects and the lack of data which is a common factor in other studies. Let's review König, *et al.*, (2012, pp. 192-201) for its content: “Lastly, there is a lack of empirical data from within Germany<sup>4</sup> or elsewhere which prove that repeating a year improves pupil performance (cf. Belser & Küsel, 1976; Einsiedler & Glumpler, 1989; Bless, *et al.*, 2004; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Tillmann & Meier, 2001; Krohne & Tillmann, 2006; Ehmke, Drechsel & Carsten sen, 2008).” (p. 192). (...)

“In order to clarify the results obtained here it is important to test other aspects, besides the school type, in contextual analyses against the retention rate at the school level.” (p. 201).

Students' performance is based on input results where learning efficiency in a classroom and school quality output can also be measured. If

<sup>3</sup> This paper is not seeking a numerical equation or charts to present results. A limited number of extreme behaviors, violent crime and war zones cases were analysed as they are outside school norms requiring a more specific methodological approach associated with victims.

<sup>4</sup> By 2025 there is significant educational data and R&D in Germany, Europe and other world economies.

students feel as misfits, performance is not improved and belongingness is at risk then how is progress determined? What then are the advantages of retention based on classroom inefficiency? Efficiency is all inclusive and is not based on segregation or selectivity but inclusion. In König, *et al.*, (2012) the authors parameters refers to Germany:

*“In Germany pupils are expected to repeat a school year if they do not perform well enough. This practice is not common in other countries (OECD, 2011). Research available to date presents hardly any empirical evidence to justify the decision to make pupils repeat years”.* (p. 200).

The arguments in König, *et al.*, (2012) and Van Canegan, *et al.*, (2022) are fundamentally correct and shared by other multinational researchers (Norton, 2011; Bach, 2019). König, *et al.*, (2012) focuses on data, teachers and school locations. In this sense school location, classroom efficiency and overall school quality becomes an issue hand in hand with teachers training, experience and availability within regions and performance. The regional implications of schools, teachers capabilities and availability becomes a political and financial question to carry on daily activities pro-or-against specific groups as immigrants. Studies continue to pile-up, money continues to be invested in national educational<sup>5</sup>, intellectual, and knowledge based mechanisms that are unconvincing to authorities to completely remove the risk and adversity to children from grading, underperformance to retention. In this sense, regional educational authorities are lost in the same old debate but still manage to reach the cooperation of all stakeholders. In Norton, (2011) the author continuously refers to the issue of performance in his research and states that the practice of retention is based on underperformance which in the US has been rooted since 1850. Norton (2011) adds a list of researchers to support his thesis that a better result is found in social promotion through block scheduling, looping, and other grading practices<sup>6</sup>:

<sup>5</sup> Refugees, asylees and guest workers families are separate types of immigrants or migrants requiring specific attention. Education investment % based on GDP (World Bank, 2022) in Belgium 11.3, Canada 11.1, China 10.5, Cuba 17.0, Dominican Republic (2023) 22.0, France 8.9, Germany 9.2, Japan 7.5, Norway 10.1 USA (2020) 12.7. Average OECD 2024 expenditure; primary to tertiary education in OECD countries is around USD 14 200, ranging from around USD 3 500 in Mexico to over USD 30 100 in Luxembourg.

<sup>6</sup> In Norton (2011): *“Although social promotion in itself is an unsatisfactory procedure for dealing with students with learning problems, promotion-plus alternatives such as un-graded primary*

*“Research studies of student retention over a period of fifty years have resulted in one major conclusion, that grade retention alone does not support the improvement of student academic performance nor is it conducive to the student’s improvement in social maturity or personal self-esteem (Kinlaw, 2005; Anderson, Whipple & Jimerson, 2002; Jimerson, 2001, 2002; Johnson & Rudolph, 2001; Hauser, 1999; Shepherd & Smith, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Norton, 1983; Koons, 1977; Sowards & Scobey, 1961).”* (p. 210).

Whereas performance and repeating a grade are linked to classrooms the question of testing or not testing performance at some levels is a policymaker matter. Ways to approach this dilemma includes redirecting time and funds into assistants, specialists, multimedia technologies for students, classroom equipment, teachers training or into school practices. Internal strategic performance mechanisms have been cited and fall in accordance with (Norton, 2011; Bach, 2019; König, *et al.*, 2012) and other studies where teachers, classrooms and schools are essential areas to implement changes. Maximilian Bach, (2019) researches themes in line with König, *et al.*, (2012) where fundamental elements are clearly defined:

*“(…) motive for retaining students. (...) I analyze whether decisions to retain students are partly a result of strategic considerations by teachers and school principals to reduce class size. (...) Shifting students across grades by retaining them allows schools to affect the size of their classes and it is well known that teachers generally prefer smaller classes. (...) Rules that set school budgets as a function of the number of classes rather than total enrollment reinforce this preference.”*(pp.1-2).

Maximillian Back (2019) appears correct and there would be limited need to look any further considering the following quote, KMK<sup>7</sup>: The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2019/2020:

*“Pupils who are not moved up have to repeat the grade they have just finished. Under certain*

*organizational arrangements, block scheduling, looping, special coaching and tutoring, and after-school and summer programs that extend learning opportunities have been successful when individualized for each student’s personal needs and interests. Spending time just repeating the material that the student has just completed has not proven to be of value.”* (p. 220).

<sup>7</sup> The KMK (2019/2020) quote is published identically in Euridice 2024. Kultusministerkonferenz; (KMK, founded in 2/1948) The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is the oldest conference of ministers in Germany and plays a significant role in the coordination and development of education in the country.

*circumstances, a pupil may also repeat a grade even if a decision has been made to let him or her move up from that grade at the end of the school year.” (p. 120)<sup>8</sup>.*

KMK makes it perfectly clear that moving up might be denied even after achieving the grade expectation (Section 5.4, Progression of pupils). Maximilian Bach, (2019) is fundamentally correct in his finding that school budgets may *fit certain unusual circumstances* in Germany and elsewhere. Whereas the focus is on *heterogeneity* the specific data as to who is retained by race, ethnicity, religion, immigration or other status is limited. The principal motivation under KMK (2019/2020) on the surface seems to be linked to classroom size, availability of teachers, class composition and local school authority policies and not exclusive on student performance.

KMK (2019-2020): (...), *“demographic forecasts, the voting behaviour of parents, the economic and social situation in the region or school planning stipulations of the competent authorities.” (Sec. 5.2).*

The political proportionality of *“country-output-wealth”* is important to national educational frameworks in developed economies as they trust and value their own national intellectual output, wealth and GDP. Whereas that concept creates friction between conservative, migrants and retention, the focus is on the future intellectual output towards GDP growth. In that sense, the national political agenda oversees the educational authorities' school system coexisting under proportionality guidelines to fit norms and economic trends. On the other hand our history review presents the hard work and innovation of numerous researchers that over the years have gone mostly unnoticed (Norton, 2011; König, *et al.*, 2012; Back, 2019; Van Canegan, *et al.*, 2022).

In Eurydice<sup>9</sup> France; According to the (de cree 2018-119): *“(…) repeating can only happen on an exceptional basis and only after the failure of the remediation with a specific educational support mechanism”*. This *exceptional basis* is desirable as it allows for a more specific and verifiable process to oversee and justify the particulars of a possible retention. France has over

30% school retention, not a desirable score. Countries with significant GDP educational investments and large foreign national residents even with the best of intentions still face significant opposition from their own national traditional conservatives. Additionally the proportionality of *“country-output-wealth”* is a principal factor when receiving countries place non-national children into their public school systems. Receiving nations face the competing interest of nationals and migrants for the same resources; not a simple task.

Let's look at Norway's answer to the (Human Rights Council resolution 37/20 "Rights of the Child" 2017, 2022). Norway removes potential risk and adversity to children from retention while implementing further assistance:

*“We have no grade retention. Young people are entitled to three (four years if attending vocational education) of upper secondary education or training. They don't have to pass certain exams in order to have this right, and adapted education is the basic principle”*.

Norway simplifies education to all students: *“They don't have to pass certain exams in order to have this right, and adapted education is the basic principle”*.

The Norwegian solution to grade retention is; *“and adapted education is the basic principle”*. That is a valuable example of non-discriminatory classroom evolution that is cost effective and inclusive of all children. *No retention* frees practices that may otherwise be manipulated by social or political discretionary choices. In Eurydice Germany : *“School-specific programmes should take account of the social and demographic requirements of the individual school. The frameworks for school quality referred to above are of central importance for the implementation of school-specific Programmes.”*

For the benefit of students' eliminating retention and reevaluating performance and knowledge transfer constitutes a guiding principle. In this sense, school budgets are freed from social and demographic corrupt management. When a student's retention might be based on enrollment (Bach, 2019) or any other non-educational reason, retention becomes a dead end. It is apparent that a practical solution is the Norwegian *“adapted education”* providing child benefits while deterring or harnessing socially non-educational issues. In Germany's *School-specific programmes*

<sup>8</sup> Eurydice Germany (2024), *“(…) pupils in the primary sector, 1.3 per cent of pupils repeated a class in school year 2023/2024”*.

<sup>9</sup> Eurydice is a network whose task is to record how educational systems are organised and operated in Europe. The Eurydice Network includes 40 European countries.

become state normatives to serve special interests. It allows national *traditional conservative, the west* or the *burghers or the right-wing conservative* to implement social values as needed. Retention in the EU and other developed economies should not even be a subject of conversation. Some countries can't even find a clear path out of their own redundancy and educational guidelines.

In Shiyang Zhang & Ao Huang (2024) the researchers take an indepth look at China:

*“The adoption of automatic grade promotion policies in China reflects a growing recognition of the negative impact of grade retention on students’ psychological well-being and aims to promote a more positive learning environment and reduce the stigma associated with repeating a grade.”* (p. 26).

The (Zhang & Huang, 2024) China study falls in line with other studies suggesting ways to remove or re-direct the risk and adversities of grade retention. The authors continue to explain that regardless of the *automatic grade promotion* other issues such as performance or underperformance and school health still remained. In Zhou, *et al.*, (2020) after Covid 19 China entered a new age for which it had a well developed background consistent with Zhang & Huang, (2024):

*“The test results prove that China has basically completed the infrastructure of the Internet through the construction of informatization and education informatization in the past three decades. This provided the basic technical guarantee and resource guarantee for this large-scale online education.”* (p. 515)

In Xinyin Chen, Qi Dong & Hong Zhou (1997) they discuss western vs chinese students' traits as differing in views and values.

*“Based on our speculations described earlier, we hypothesised that, inconsistent with the previous arguments concerning Chinese parenting practices (e.g. Ekblad, 1986; Steinberg, et al., 1992), authoritative parenting style would be positively associated with school academic achievement and social status. In Contrast, authoritarian parenting would be related to school difficulties and peer rejection. (p.858). (...) As we described earlier, although shy, anxious, and restrained behaviour is considered socially immature and incompetent, indicating internalising problems in the West (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981), it is acceptable in Chinese culture (e.g. Chen, et al., 1992, 1995a, b). Indeed, shy-inhibited children are regarded as*

*understanding and well behaved in China.”* (p. 868).

So far educational differences from grading, underperformance and retention, to; special coaching, tutoring, non-grading systems, automatic pass, inclusion based and adapted education consist of norms and remedies to prevent failure and long term student adversities. The basic principles of equality generally simplifies the complexities and stereotyping of students as a way to balance socioeconomic and political strategic power or control. China as an economic powerhouse continuously expanding their GDP has few limitations with funding the Ministry of Education to implement growth and value from research, such as; *automatic grade promotion* and other beneficial programs to children. Whether Western and Chinese children have some social differences, the fundamentals of success, happiness, achievement and sound decision making should be the end result. Lastly, an educational authority that allows retention after academic achievement needs to re-focus and consider the child's humanity, well-being and his/her future independently from processes. Retention and non-promotion removal is cost effective, freeing resources. Robin DiAngelo, (2022):

*“The language of violence that many whites use to describe anti-racist endeavors is not without significance, as it is another example of the way that White Fragility distorts and perverts reality. By employing terms that connote physical abuse, whites tap into the classic discourse of people of color (...).”* (p. 65).

Robin DiAngelo, (2022) refers to white fragility and their distortions regarding *people of color* as a security shield. In that sense what (DiAngelo, 2022) refers to as whites in our history perspective equates to what (Chen, *et al.*, 1997) refers to; as the West, or the *erase-and-replace regime* of Native Americans by (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2025). To sum up, China understands the *language of violence* and the politics of ethnic cleansing as disseminated by political western rhetoric acting upon *people of color* worldwide. Yet, China continues with a policy of market growth with countries outside of their own political convictions and economic development where race and religion seem not to interfere with business as usual. China's market perspective seems to be a formula for worldwide business adaptability, fast track innovation, economic growth and

educational success while at the same time makes China the target of the *language of violence* as part of a western policy. As we review the literature regarding underperformance at school, retention or non-promotion, the subject of *race, migrants and minorities* continuously arise and are redirected, ignored or dismissed within questionable guidelines.

The language of violence, heterogeneity, cultural diversity and migrant mobility are largely distributed across educational authorities where nationhood ideologies continuously confront challenges as protectionism, racism and misinformation assumes many forms. This balance or imbalance within protectionism and the far right misinformation and pseudoscience affects educational outcomes in ways that remain mostly untested worldwide. Multiculturalism and diversity require understanding and equality basics which in the long run builds positive values for people worldwide. Removing retention is a step in the right direction.

### **The Intersection of Real Time in Educational Experience**

In order for students to achieve a successful education, policymakers, teachers and stakeholders need to work on long term goals and expected outcomes when assessing performance, underperformance and failure considering the future of children. What are some of the challenges proposed in Simona Popa (2025):

*“However, while reflecting on our responsibility to future generations may seem solely about leaving the planet habitable for those who come after us, in reality it goes much deeper. Serious reflection on the future of education offers a unique opportunity to tame an untamable world and actively shape what lies ahead.”* (p. 508).

What is the educational approach in Nazime Öztürk, Flora Woltran & Susanne Schwab (2025): *“Moreover, by positioning children not merely as recipients of education policy but as active participants in its creation, this context-sensitive study contributes to a deeper understanding of the disconnect between how multilingual students are perceived by policymakers and how they perceive themselves. This approach not only enriches our comprehension of the challenges and opportunities within segregated language learning environments but also emphasizes the importance of student voice in shaping effective and inclusive educational practices”*. (p. 14).

Children as the focal point participant sets the stage influencing the long lasting beneficial effects of education moving into a wider future. A children's first approach as a concept would make students full participants positively influencing the future of each student in a well thought collective effort. Eleanore Hargreaves, Denise Buchanan & Laura Quick (2025) present a sensitive viewpoint closely resembling a *children's first approach*:

*“Imagining schooling as a positive experience, we would see each child constructing themselves, and being constructed by others, as equally worthy in the schooling situation, regardless of their prior attainment. How they identify themselves will be respected; as will the groups they choose to identify with”*. (p. 214).

The educational experience gained over the past hundred plus years is critical not only historical where the basic academic and students' success are already outlined. (Martha Pérez-Mugg, 2025; Timothy Messer-Kruse, 2024; Michael Hand & Nicholas C. Burbules, 2025; Genevieve Allaire-Duquette, 2025; Theresa J. Ambo & Steven M. Gavazzi, 2025; Popa, 2025; Öztürk, *et al.*, 2025; Hargreaves, *et al.*, 2025).

In a world of continuously improved educational tools to conform with a new primary school formation children's humanity is constructed to achieve a collective effort that leads to a wholesome future. A further advancement should evolve from inclusiveness away from a world of perpetual confrontation, right wing alarmism and misinformation impositions. It should start from students' teamwork, group activities and crafting in the classroom to develop a collective future. A class that learns and grows together within a culturally diverse classroom gains and shares a positive outlook in the history and understanding of global trends.

### **Retention Consequences, Interventions, Earnings, Health and Crime**

Antonin Dubois (2022) proposes a history based theory fitting to this segment:

*“The disinterest of French historians in students of the nineteenth and early twentieth century can be significantly illustrated by the fact that out of the few publications that existed on the subject until the early 1980s, several were written by foreign historians, in English and in French”*. (...) *“From the 1950s to the 1970s, countless writings dealt with students' current issues (even though less than in the USA and Germany) such as their political mobilizations, overcrowding in faculties,*

*and housing shortages, but barely with their history.” (p. 160).*

Christelle Garrouste (2010) provides additional in-depth historical details to fill in some gaps between educational history and the evolution of primary schools.

*“It is only in the 1960s that the post-War pedagogical debates started receiving a legislative echo in the Western block. Austria and Italy focused on the clarification of the authority allocation between the state, the regions, the provinces, the communities and the schools. The French Community of Belgium fixed the minimum attendance age to nursery schools at 2 and a half, and Denmark passed an act compelling authorities to make available all public services to all citizens, including pre-school structures. (...)*

*the formal incorporation of Kindergarten into the education system of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and guaranteed places (by law) for all children from 3 to 6 years of age.” (p. 10).*

*“(…) The concerns about equity and minority access to education, which dominated US educational reforms in the 1960s and 1970s (Bailey, 1992), spread to Europe in the 1980s and marked the nature of the reforms in pre-primary education for the following two decades.” (p. 11).*

Christelle Garrouste (2010) study covers a broad spectrum of concerns aligned with the European Commission to single out best practices by educational authorities and programs leading to quality. Topics such as students' fears, teachers training, interactive technology learning, equality, minority access and inclusiveness to education remain a work in progress. In developed economies countries move closer to understanding and becoming a multicultural society and nation. In doing so they face their own rules, guidelines and principles blocking changes.

In Germany with a focus on the Netherlands the study by Simon ter Meulen (2023) points to one adverse economic factor: *“Retainers earn about 3,000 euro, or 8.5%, less than promoted students at the age of 28”.* (p. 3). The study suggests that cheap labor may be a derivative from grade retention in a developed EU economy which by itself should raise some red flags. In that sense, if the earning loss at age 28 represents 3,000 euros at age 65 the cumulative loss is over 110,000 euros plus the adjusted rate of inflation. Such results are further aggravated when considering guest workers, asylees and political refugee children's

lifetime losses from retention. In Germany grade retention stands at around 20.2%, (Meulen, 2023). The questions of equity, quality and inequality also arise in (Meulen, 2023);

*“ (...) Grade retainers have a 4.5 percent point lower probability (IV estimate) of ever going to university.” (p. 18). (...) This is the first paper to evaluate these opposing labor market impacts of grade retention.” (p. 29).*

The following studies covered elements of retention, history, policymakers and financials (Jimerson, et al., 2002; Dubois, 2022; Garrouste, 2010; Meulen, 2023) supplementing educational history and the pedagogical fragmentation of retention. Meulen's (2023) *annual earnings penalty* as a stand-alone factor is disturbing enough. The social cost and the loss of earnings or the before and after cost of crime from Enrico Moretti (2006) adds a further educational layer:

*“Besides its effects on productivity and earnings, human capital may also reduce the probability that an individual engage in socially costly activities, such as crime. Crime is a negative externality with enormous social costs. If education reduces crime, then schooling will have social benefits that are not taken into account by individuals, and most of this benefit is likely to be realized at the local level: cities with high levels of education would have lower crime rates. Given the large social costs of crime, even small reductions in crime associated with education may be economically important. There are a number of reasons to believe that education can reduce criminal activity. First, schooling increases the returns to legitimate work, raising the opportunity costs of illegal behavior. Additionally, punishment for criminal behavior often entails incarceration. By raising wage rates, schooling makes any time spent out of the labor market more costly. Second, schooling may directly affect the psychic rewards from crime itself. (p. 36). (...) Models incorporating state dependence suggest that those who stay in school are less likely to be delinquent later in life than those who drop out.” (p. 37).*

Enrico Moretti (2006) study suggests that Europeans have a lesser occurrence of criminal activity when compared to the US. *“Furthermore, increases in education can reduce criminal participation and improve voters' political behavior”*, (Moretti, 2006. P. 43). The introduction of lower earnings and crime directly related to classrooms and schools should simplify the reasons to invest in early preventive measures. The retention and non-promotion cost limits

resources that might otherwise be available to counteract underperformance, school drop-outs and later in life crime. By comparison, Russell W. Rumberger (1987) earnings differential for high school drop-outs in the US decades before (Meulen, 2023; Moretti, 2006) were higher than the retainers financial figures of today in Europe:

*“They are also more likely to engage in crime, have poorer health, have lower rates of intergenerational mobility, and lower rates of political participation.” (...) The earnings differential between male high school dropouts and male high school graduates increased from \$73,000 in 1968 to \$260,000 in 1979.” (p, 115).*

The earnings differentials, crime and health may be improved by early corrective interventions at the classroom and school level (Rumberger, 1987; Meulen, 2023; Moretti, 2006). The ramifications of underperformance are best managed with early-on interventions and *continuous school based activities* with specific and timely targets.

### **A Health Perspective, Exclusions and Juvenile Crime**

In Högberg, *et al.*, (2021) the authors explored the well-being and health issues of the students. Consequently, as educational authority allocates funds into pedagogical tools for testing, grading, and outlining underperformance a basic component should be preventive failure activities considering the student's health as a prime factor. Högberg, *et al.*, (2021) emphasises the repercussions to health:

*“(...) in recent decades there has been a growing emphasis on testing, assessment and grading in education policy. However, the health-related consequences of these policies have only received scant attention, especially among quantitative researchers. The results of this study suggest that the way in which assessment systems are designed could have important repercussions for the health and overall wellbeing of pupils, including the extent of gender-based inequalities in health. If this is the case, then reforms involving increased testing and grading may need to consider the potential negative side effects on health and give more weight to the non-academic consequences of the policies when considering how assessments are implemented. This conclusion is in line with recent recommendations to take wellbeing into account when designing and evaluating education policy (OECD 2017).” (p. 100).*

Students well-being is fundamental in any school regardless of nation, location or classroom

heterogeneity. Health, crime and non-promotion are a few factors in this segment where the findings clarify issues such as, early intervention tools and reasons to implement preventive ways and activities to improve outcomes. Additionally underperformance, fear, crime, high school and higher education drop-outs, among other conditions affects earnings, health and psychological behavior. All these factors should serve as a warning for inclusiveness of all students away from the more traditional exclusionary policies. In a recent UK annual review Stephen Machin & Matteo Sandi (2024) compare how education deters juvenile crime and drop outs within an economic background:

*“Evidence of the productivity effect of schooling and how this may lead to reduced crime has also been retrieved in a variety of settings and, for the most part, with a focus on early childhood education. (p. 13), (...) What is by now a significant body of research, much of which is a very recent development in the past ten years, explores the mechanisms by which education may lead to lower crime at different stages of the education process. This research covers early age interventions, primary and secondary schooling and policy changes that alter the school dropout age. (p. 15). (...) Finally, a further dimension of school quality that is examined in this literature concerns the strategic use of discipline sanctions and discrimination by school principals towards low-performing students and ethnic minorities. (p. 18)”.*

In Rathmann, *et al.*, (2020) the issue stems in the practice, *all migrants were excluded:*

*“To date, there is no empirical evidence on well-being trajectories around the event of grade retention and repetition conditional on the attended school type. Previous studies reveal, in general, that lower life satisfaction [43] has been reported among students in school types with lower educational standards (i.e., general schools in Germany)”. (p. 22). (...) NEPS allows the best possible representation of the German school landscape. ... Because ethnic heterogeneity is assumed to trigger heterogeneous effects on the relevance of grade retention for general and school well-being, all migrants were excluded from our analysis”.* (p. 23).

The exclusion of migrants from studies is a common occurrence to streamline national academic norms and results. How does the exclusion of students impact the public school system? International schools or bilingual schools

generally use more inclusive metrics integrating cultural diversity with a mix of beneficial strategic programs and practices. The excluded migrants in Rathmann, *et al.*, (2020) may resemble the Machin & Sandi (2024) later in life crimes if migrants were accounted for. In a multicultural school system testing only nationals is evidence of segregation and selectivity. Another EU study, Goos, *et al.*, (2021) serves to identify results as follows:

*“Our study revealed that repeaters seem worst off in ‘separation countries’, applying grade retention and tracking to tackle student heterogeneity, and best off in the United States, applying ability grouping, setting, and streaming (and to a much lesser extent grade retention) to deal with student heterogeneity (...) Keeping in mind the costs grade retention brings about to the economy and the (family of the) individual student, we advocate countries, and (...) efforts to make available more resources for schools (...) to provide all at-risk students with targeted remedial interventions that have been proven to be cost-effective (e.g., self-regulation interventions, reading Interventions (p. 24).”*

In Pedraja-Chaparro, *et al.*, (2015) they expand on EU scores and the double digit grade retention:

*“The phenomenon of grade retention is now a major problem in countries such as France or Spain. According to the PISA 2009 report, over 30% of 15-year-old students from both countries had repeated at least one grade. These figures are a warning sign of school failure and early school dropout, whose percentages are consistent with grade retention rates.” (p. 18).*

A 30% retention rate is too high, about 1 in 3 students. France, Belgium and Germany are also below the Socio economic fairness average of the OECD, whereas; Spain, Japan and Korea are above the Socio economic fairness average, and Macao-China is the highest (OECD 2018-2022; PISA 2022 Database). In (OECD, 2025):

*“(...) drive a more robust knowledge building in education through relevant research grants and projects. It should also synthesise evidence in a cost-effective and co-ordinated way and provide policy makers and practitioners with adequate support to mobilise this evidence in their decisions”. (p. 166).*

How relevant is research when some students are unaccounted for? In Pedraja-Chaparro, *et al.*, (2015) they stop at; *“a warning sign of school failure”*, entering that aspect of grade retention is

an enormous challenge. In Pellegrini, *et al.*, (2021):

*“This meta-analysis provides encouraging findings, suggesting that low achievers can make substantial gains in mathematics if they receive relatively cost-effective small group tutoring. (...) inequalities in mathematics achievement can be overcome using proven, replicable strategies and by professional development focused on implementation of traditional curricula”. (p. 24).*

Implementing additional or new cost effective pedagogical strategies and technological tools to counteract and assist underperforming students seems to be the overall message.

## DISCUSSION

Sophia H. J. Hwang & Elise Cappella (2018) encourages stakeholders to implement programs that will motivate underperforming students.

*“Using a national data set and propensity score methods, the current study suggests that first- or second-grade retention lowers students’ reading test scores six or seven years later. (...) Ultimately, we hope this study motivates researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to identify ways to better serve underperforming students in the early elementary years, so they may have stronger academic and psychosocial adaptation into and through the middle grades.” (pp. 580-581).*

Hwang & Capella, (2018) gather the essentials setting a better practice attitude to assist underperforming children in the future. In Ikeda & García (2014) they identify the double digit within diverse geographical and cultural areas:

*“In terms of the proportion of students who had repeated at least one grade, the report situated the PISA 2009 OECD average at 13%. The between-country variation was high, running from 0% of students retained in Japan, Korea and Norway, to over 25% in countries such as Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain (and other partner countries around the world, with Macao-China, Tunisia and Brazil being the countries with the highest retention rates of over 40% (...).”(p. 273).*

Japan, Korea and Norway are at the forefront of what appears to be a competitive advantage to children, parents and nations from retention removal. One decade later in (OECD, 2022-2025) Macao-China made surprising advances. Whereas the general well-being in these countries on paper imply a progressive achievement is not without challenges. In Ikeda & Garcia (2014) the grade

retention of the EU countries is extremely high. Norway's immigration hurdles continue as newcomers, first and second generation migrants outnumber others as school drop-outs later in life, (Aarsæther, 2021; Ringrose, 2024; Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2023).

Demographics in American studies identify people with categories such as; Whites, (non hispanics) Blacks, Hispanics or occasionally including Orientals, Native Americans, people of color and lately brown or black people. The classifications themselves are racist and biased but they are rarely approached as such. Yet, by comparison the all inclusive grade retention in the USA is lower than the EU counterparts with few exceptions. In Warren, *et al.*, (2014, table 2) the study concludes with a 2.4% retention in grade 9 and a 6.2% in first grade with few mitigating factors in the US. In Goos, *et al.*, (2021, table 1) their grade retention chart shows the USA with a 9% realistic overall grade retention.

On the other hand migrants inclusion in a random example (Faas, 2008) the researcher points to lack of data to formulate specific programs:

*“Another implication arising from this article, and related to the above, is the need to collect more statistics to assess the educational and professional situation of minority ethnic communities. (...) Germany has no tradition of gathering such data; figures about the size of the migrant population or the performance of school students”.* (p. 120-121).

In Germany citizenship was not available to guest workers as a right until 2000 (Faas, 2008; p. 116) and that is not free of other challenges. Let's examine a trend, in or about Germany Voß & Blumenthal (2019): *“Even if one considers that it is unlikely that any inclusion-related concept will solve all emotional-social difficulties, the data point to an increased need for action.”* (p. 1353).

Heiner Rinderman (2024) regarding German education:

*“For Germany, it can be clearly stated that more burgher or right-wing conservative policies are associated with higher cognitive achievement levels of students in school. We tried to show that this has to do with education policies that are more strict, and more focused on achievement (rather than equality and the like).”* (p. 15).

In general a number of EU studies including Rinderman (2024) consider the (rather than equality and the like) set aside or refer to

immigrants as a separate educational component. Such separate components concepts as the no migration background and traditional education fall short of (Epstein, 1986, 1995; Sheldon and Epstein, 2005; Epstein, *et al.*, 2018; Warren, *et al.*, 2014; Goos, *et al.*, 2021). Inclusive components of students and family rather than exclusion components in primary schools and educational research should lead to the creation of more equitable results within cultural diversity, multiculturalism and multicultural nations. Naturally cultural diversity from the perspective of the burgher conservative is effective in limited regions, and controversial in other regions leading to a continuous social and political debate. Daniel Faas (2008):

*It is deeply problematic that, after 50 years of migration, Germany still officially employs terms such as ‘foreigner’ (Ausländer) or ‘foreign citizen’ (ausländische Mitbürger) rather than acknowledging hybrid identities such as German Muslims or Turkish Germans.”* (p. 121).

The last decades leaned towards a better understanding of diversity and multicultural societies. Developed economies have employment needs that tend to be filled by foreign nationals in such countries; multiculturalism may not fit national norms. By comparison our issues of grade retention appear uncomplicated. Findings in (Ikeda & Garcia, 2014) present a clear distinction where zero retention in Japan, Korea and Norway are absolutely benefiting their students as the academic complexities of grade retention have been removed, redirected or reduced. The removal of retention benefits multiculturalism as it removes some assimilation stress from migrant families.

Suppose that a family receives a school sponsored retention option to correct the underperformance of their child and the family accepts. Decades later the same student commits a violent crime. The school and parents had declined or had no alternative mechanisms redirecting the long term consequences of retention to the student. The student faced in his/her own level of understanding the initial punishment of retention and the later in life consequences in prison. Any family could be affected by this phenomenon in any country where retention is an unnecessary option for underperformance.

Let's review juvenile crimes and schooling in Latin America. In Francisco Gatica & Juan Pablo Valenzuela (2025) the retention path to crime was not considered: *“In the region, approximately*

between 5% and 30% of third- and sixth-grade students who participated in the ERCE 2019 report having repeated a grade at some point (UNESCO, 2021)". (p. 4). The region comprises 14 Latin American countries including Chile. The (Human Rights Council resolution 37/20 Norway, 2017, 2022) "inclusion based on adapted education" or the "adoption of automatic grade promotion policies" from China (Zhang & Huang, 2024) will provide a path away from the retention cycle of the region. Removing retention will liberate funds, free teachers time and remove unknown long term risk and adversities to children. Diaz, *et al.*, (2016, pp. 38-39) explained: "This paper makes three main contributions. First, together with a recent paper (Depew and Eren (2015), it is the first one that estimates a causal effect of grade retention on juvenile crime and it is the first such evidence for a developing country". (p. 38), (...) Thus, it is essential to design policies that will counteract this negative effect, breaking the connection between grade repetition and other causes of dropping out and juvenile crime". (p. 3).

Diaz, *et al.*, (2016) studies juvenile crime in Chile expanding retention consequences. In Eren, *et al.*, (2022) the authors claim to be the first to estimate the effects of grade retention on juvenile crime for developing countries. If that was true this review may be the first to link mass-murder to failure (Pelsner, 2008; Silova, *et al.*, 2007). In Katsiyannis, *et al.*, (2018):

"Following the Columbine mass shooting, the secret service in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education reviewed 37 incidents of "targeted school violence" and identified 10 key findings associated with these incidents. (p. 3), (...) A 14-year-old White male went to school with the intention of killing his teacher for giving him a failing grade". (p. 5). 1 adult (killed) 2 students and 1 adult (injured)

The incident above occurred on 4 December 1986 at the Lewistown, Montana High School. Katsiyannis, *et al.*, (2018) history examination, presented a combined report of 37 incidents with 10 key findings from (a) to (j); in (e), *most attackers exhibited behavior of concern prior to the attack*. One 14 year old killed and injured adults and students over a failing grade. Once again as we have stated, *students face their own level of understanding ... failure*. These results are preventable with early intervention and preparation. A fundamental re-evaluation of the teacher-pupil relationship is necessary

(Hargreaves, 2015) . The *region* will benefit from widening its scope not only removing retention but also counteracting the long term consequences. Removing students' fear of retention should free primary school students from their own understanding of retention. Teachers' authoritarian fears also need evaluation.

Scandinavian countries benefit from a single digit grade retention where the educational practice of a Nordic Model or Nordic Dialogue<sup>10</sup> assumes children's viewpoint, inclusion of all participants, flexible examination practices and regional models within a high quality education to validate itself. Such model and the above average GDP investments in (Denmark-Norway just-under 7%) and a moderate (Finland-Sweden just-under 6%) per student yields quality returns with variants after R&D (OECD, 2024; Heiskanen & Franck, 2023; Heiskanen, *et al.*, 2022; Harju-Luukkainen, *et al.*, 2022; Bogetoft, *et al.*, 2015; Antikainen, 2006)<sup>11</sup>.

Recent tragic events in Sweden regarding the criminal conduct of Rickard Andersson at Wadköping Education Center in Orebro opens a new dimension. Andersson was a high school drop-out whose grading scores and underperformance may have contributed to his action. Hjorth-Trolle, *et al.*, (2022) years before the Orebro tragedy had alerted educational authorities of consequences of grading and qualifying or disqualifying students:

(...) "the consequences of a student receiving a lower or higher grade than they would have under a different grading practice are very real, and not just because they may impact the decision making of the student; they may also qualify or disqualify the student from further education or bar them entry to the most selective schools, altering what future options they have for educational attainment and exacerbating existing educational inequality." (p. 469).

A report by Aftonbladet published on (2/6, 2025) regarding Andersson read that: *He passed in aesthetic activities and history but failed in all other subjects*. The trend of criminal behavior developed from early schooling and carried into later in life failure, dropping-out or other factors are real (Diaz, *et al.*, 2016; Eren, *et al.*, 2022;

<sup>10</sup> OECD (2024, p. 254) In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, expenditure per student at tertiary level is lower than at primary level when R&D cost is excluded.

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2024, p. 260), (...) "little funding originates from the central government for primary education in Germany (3%), Canada (5%), Spain (9%) and the United States (12%)".

Pelsner, 2008; Silova, *et al.*, 2007; Katsiyannis, *et al.*, 2018). Among victims of the Orebro tragedy were some Syrians bringing the issue of immigrants to a new level in Sweden. Andersson needed help and it is very likely that he at some point had requested help. From a traditional Swedish academic perspective Andersson's struggles need to be assessed to successfully intervene with students' lifelong consequences of retention. Retention leading to violent crime is disturbing and significant. In Eren, *et al.*, (2022): *“Being retained increases the likelihood of being convicted of any crime by 1.25 percentage points, or 10.85% relative to the baseline mean, and increases the number of convictions by 0.025 (18.38%). The effects are largest for violent crime: retention increases the likelihood of a violent crime conviction [26] by 1.05 percentage points (58.44%) and increases the number of violent crime convictions by 0.017 (85.00%), (2022, pp. 26-27)”*.

Studies linking juveniles to violent crime arising from underperformance and retention are a warning with tragic implications. The Wadköping Education Center in Orebro tragedy shares with (Hjorth-Trolle, *et al.*, 2022; Alatalo, *et al.*, 2024) some common elements for Sweden. In (Alatalo, *et al.*, 2024) the focus is on teachers and a deteriorating system. Considering the current Orebro tragedy and its international reach, it's unfair to think that such an incident is solely due to teachers' performance. The scale of the tragedy is more indicative of a failure with shared responsibilities between the educational authorities, a particular school, stakeholders and a community rather than singular issues of teachers' performance. Alatalo, *et al.*, (2024):

*“Finally, among an array of characteristics depicting teacher quality, teachers' prior knowledge is one that can affect students' progress in school. In light of the deterioration of students' school performance in Swedish compulsory school in recent decades, it would be justified to consider the impact of Swedish teachers' school performance on students' school progress as an important area for future research.” (p.76).*

These researchers results may be considered by other educational authorities and not only in Sweden (Diaz, *et al.*, 2016; Katsiyannis, *et al.*, 2015, 2018; Hjorth-Trolle, *et al.*, 2022; Eren, *et al.*, 2022; Alatalo, *et al.*, 2024). Later in life consequences extend from students to all stakeholders where discretionary choices are made. Success depends on handling risk,

adversities and all current and future consequences effectively within a well balanced intervention and resource distribution program away from segregation, selectivity and non-accountability. One thing is certain: grade retention is not the answer for underperformance. Grade retention has very little usefulness, if any at all.

## CONCLUSION

In the US the growing concern with migrants is a politically explosive topic not easily solved with a wall. Historically, from the Native American perspective immigrants are those who invaded their homeland, killed and took by force lands, rights, language and traditions in exchange for a limited participation in a democratic society. Our world coexists among countries repeating history as they remove people, assume land and systematically demolish cities while offering victims nothing in return. In Europe there is a growing anti-migrant concern that is not vanishing simply by the non-accountability of foreigners in scientific studies. Further complications arise as discretionary choices originating from right wing theorists and conservatives lack vision to understand the effects of forced displacement and exclusion in modern economies.

Retainees' future financial losses, their long term well-being, higher drop-out rates, *juvenile crime and crime later in life* sums up to a number of avoidable outcomes. Early intervention during primary school with motivated educators, skillful training, advanced interactive technologies, student teamwork and crafting activities are an indispensable step to manage underperformance and adverse outcomes later in life. Constructive cost effective grading models to prevent retention, for example; *adapted learning, social promotion, automatic pass, parallel education, assisted learning, special coaching, tutoring and other* will benefit students' future. Additionally, innovative cost effective technological activities to compliment grading models will further enhance value and opportunities.

Mounting violent tragedies awakens communities to rethink choices and remedies to safeguard students, faculty and communities. The violent crime patterns associated with retention hold too many unknowns. Effective intervention will include all students' involvement in motivational activities, retention removal, motivated teachers and integrational schools. Retention is not an answer, it is a punishment that involves too many risks and adversities. It has no clear benefits. A

study to focus on extreme hatred, extreme violence and the total frustration of students linked to school failures and retention seems to be needed.

## REFERENCES

1. Aarsæther, F. "Learning environment and social inclusion for newly arrived migrant children placed in separate programmes in elementary schools in Norway." *Cogent education* 8.1 (2021): 1932227.
2. Alatalo, T., Hansson, Å. & Johansson, S. "Teachers' academic achievement: evidence from Swedish longitudinal register data." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 47.1 (2024): 60-80.
3. Allaire-Duquette, G., et al. "Primary school pupils' ability to detect fake science news following a news media literacy intervention: Exploration of their success rate, evaluation strategies, self-efficacy beliefs, and views of science news." *Journal of Digital Educational Technology* 5.2 (2025): ep2509.
4. Ambo, T. J. & Gavazzi, S. M. "Family science, land-grant universities, and the daunting legacy of the land-grab institution." *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 17.1 (2025): 112-126.
5. Antikainen, A. "In search of the Nordic model in education." *Scandinavian journal of educational research* 50.3 (2006): 229-243.
6. Bach, M. "Strategic grade retention. No. 19-059." *ZEW Discussion Papers*, (2019).
7. Balow, I. H. & Schwager, M. "Retention in Grade: A Failed Procedure." (1990).
8. Bendixsen, S. & Danielsen, H. "Great expectations: Migrant parents and parent-school cooperation in Norway." *Parents, Schools and the State*. Routledge, (2023). 33-48.
9. Blasingame, E., Hansen, E. R. & Witmer, R. C. "Are Descriptive Representatives More Successful Passing Group-Relevant Legislation? The Case of Native American State Legislators." *Political Research Quarterly* 78.1 (2025): 308-322.
10. Bogetoft, P., Heinesen, E. & Tranæs, T. "The efficiency of educational production: A comparison of the Nordic countries with other OECD countries." *Economic Modelling* 50 (2015): 310-321.
11. Brophy, J. "Grade repetition." (2006).
12. Chen, X., Dong, Q. & Zhou, H. "Authoritative and authoritarian parenting practices and social and school performance in Chinese children." *International journal of behavioral development* 21.4 (1997): 855-874.
13. Dader, K., Ghantous, W., Masad, D., Joronen, M., Kallio, K. P., Riding, J. & Vainikka, J. "Topologies of scholasticide in Gaza: education in spaces of elimination." *Fennia-International Journal of Geography*, 20.1 (2024): 1-12.
14. DiAngelo, R. "White fragility: Why Understanding racism can be so hard for white people (adapted for young adults)." *Beacon press*, (2022).
15. Díaz, J., et al. "The impact of grade retention on juvenile crime." *Santiago* (2016). Díaz, J., Grau, N., Reyes, T. & Rivera, J. (2016).
16. Diris, R. "Don't hold back? The effect of grade retention on student achievement." *Education Finance and Policy* 12.3 (2017): 312-341.
17. Di Sano, S., et al. "Cross-cultural connections: School climate and equity in Germany, Italy, Latvia, and the United States." *School Psychology* 39.2 (2024): 224.
18. Dubois, A. "Europe's forgotten students? The historiography of 19th and early 20th century students in France." *CIAN - Revista de Historia de las Universidades*, 25.1 (2022): 156-192.
19. Eren, O., Lovenheim, M. F. & Mocan, H. N. "The effect of grade retention on adult crime: Evidence from a test-based promotion policy." *Journal of Labor Economics*, 40.2 (2022): 361-395.
20. Epstein, J. L. "Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement." *The Elementary School Journal*, 86.3 (1986): 277-294.
21. Epstein, J. L. "School/family/community partnerships." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76.9 (1995): 701.
22. Epstein, J. L., et al. *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Corwin Press, (2018).
23. Eurydice. *Norway (2024); Sweden (2024); Finland (2024); Latvia (2024); France (2024); Germany (2024)*.
24. Faas, D. "From foreigner pedagogy to intercultural education: An analysis of the German responses to diversity and its impact on schools and students." *European Educational Research Journal*, 7.1 (2008): 108-123.
25. García, J. L., Heckman, J. J. & Ronda, V. "The lasting effects of early-childhood education on promoting the skills and social mobility of disadvantaged African Americans and their

- children." *Journal of Political Economy*, 131.6 (2023): 1477–1506.
26. Garrouste, C. "100 years of educational reforms in Europe: A contextual database." *Dissertation, European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC)*, (2010).
  27. Gatica, F. & Valenzuela, J. P. "América Latina estancada en la mejora escolar. Resultados de la prueba ERCE y factores que influyen en el logro educativo en la última década." *REICE. Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, (2025): 1–23.
  28. Ghantous, W. "Encountering the Israeli war machine." (2023).
  29. Glick, P. & Sahn, D. E. "Early academic performance, grade repetition, and school attainment in Senegal: A panel data analysis." *The World Bank Economic Review*, 24.1 (2010): 93–120.
  30. Goos, M., Pipa, J. & Peixoto, F. "Effectiveness of grade retention: A systematic review and meta-analysis." *Educational Research Review*, 34 (2021): 100401.
  31. Galuschka, K. & Schulte-Körne, G. "The diagnosis and treatment of reading and/or spelling disorders in children and adolescents." *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*, 113.16 (2016): 279.
  32. Hand, M. & Burbules, N. C. "Symposium introduction: Educating responsible believers." *Educational Theory*, (2025).
  33. Hargreaves, E., Buchanan, D. & Quick, L. "Children's life-histories in primary schools: Imagining schooling as a positive experience." *Springer Nature*, (2025).
  34. Hargreaves, E. "'I think it helps you better when you're not scared': Fear and learning in the primary classroom." *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 23.4 (2015): 617–638.
  35. Harju-Luukkainen, H. K., Sulkunen, S. & Maunula, M. "Cross-national achievement surveys and educational monitoring in Finland." *EUR: Scientific and Technical Research Series*, (2022).
  36. Heiskanen, N. & Franck, K. "The paradox of documentation in early childhood special education in Finland and Norway: Exploring discursive tensions in the public debate." (2023).
  37. Heiskanen, N., Alasuutari, M. & Vehkakoski, T. "Intertextual voices of children, parents, and specialists in individual education plans." *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 65.1 (2021): 36–53.
  38. Hjorth-Trolle, A., Rosenqvist, E. & Hed, A. "Grading practices and the social gradient in GPA: Quasi-experimental evidence from Sweden." *European Sociological Review*, 38.3 (2022): 455–471.
  39. Högberg, B., et al. "Consequences of school grading systems on adolescent health: Evidence from a Swedish school reform." *Journal of Education Policy*, 36.1 (2021): 84–106.
  40. Human Rights Council Resolution, UN. "Subject: Norway's answer to questions concerning resolution 37/20 'Rights of the Child'." (2018).
  41. Hwang, S. H. J. & Cappella, E. "Rethinking early elementary grade retention: Examining long-term academic and psychosocial outcomes." *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 11.4 (2018): 559–587.
  42. Ikeda, M. & García, E. "Grade repetition: A comparative study of academic and non-academic consequences." *OECD Journal: Economic Studies*, 1 (2013): 269–315.
  43. Jimerson, S. R., Anderson, G. E. & Whipple, A. D. "Winning the battle and losing the war: Examining the relation between grade retention and dropping out of high school." *Psychology in the Schools*, 39.4 (2002): 441–457.
  44. Katsiyannis, A., Whitford, D. K. & Ennis, R. P. "Historical examination of United States intentional mass school shootings in the 20th and 21st centuries: Implications for students, schools, and society." *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27 (2018): 2562–2573.
  45. Khasnabis, D. & Goldin, S. "Don't be fooled, trauma is a systemic problem: Trauma as a case of weaponized educational innovation." *Occasional Paper Series*, 2020.43 (2020): 5.
  46. Kjeøy, I., Andresen, S. & Falkenberg, A. "Children who do not attend school: Rules, measures and practices from Norway." (2023).
  47. Kleeberg-Niepage, A., et al. "What makes a good school? Perspectives of students at inclusive secondary schools in Germany." *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28.13 (2024): 3042–3064.
  48. König, J., Darge, K. & Schreiber, M. "Teachers' beliefs about retention: Effects on teaching quality." *Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs*, (2012): 191–204.
  49. KMK. The education system in the Federal Republic of Germany (2019/2020).

50. Laenui, P. "Processes of decolonization." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (2000): 150–160.
51. Lomawaima, K. T. & McCarty, T. L. *"To remain an Indian": Lessons in democracy from a century of Native American education*. Teachers College Press, (2025).
52. Machin, S. & Sandi, M. "Crime and education." *Annual Review of Economics*, 17 (2024).
53. McCoy, A. R. & Reynolds, A. J. "Grade retention and school performance: An extended investigation." *Journal of School Psychology*, 37.3 (1999): 273–298.
54. Moretti, E. "Private and social returns to education." *Rivista di Politica Economica*, 96.5/6 (2006): 3.
55. Neitzel, A. J., et al. "A synthesis of quantitative research on programs for struggling readers in elementary schools." *Reading Research Quarterly*, 57.1 (2022): 149–179.
56. Noddings, N. "What does it mean to educate the whole child?" *Educational Leadership*, 63.1 (2005): 8.
57. Norton, M. S. "Please, not another push to get tough on student retention." *Planning and Changing*, 42 (2011): 209–223.
58. Norway's answer to questions concerning Human Rights Council resolution 37/20 "Rights of the Child" 2017, 2022
59. OECD (2025), *Everybody Cares About Using Education Research Sometimes: Perspectives of Knowledge Intermediaries*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris,
60. Ollendick, T. H., et al. "Increasing spelling achievement: An analysis of treatment procedures utilizing an alternating treatments design." *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 13.4 (1980): 645–654.
61. Öztürk, N., Woltran, F. & Schwab, S. "Learning in segregated settings: Opportunities and barriers addressed in elementary students' lived experiences." *Language and Education*, (2025): 1–18.
62. Pedraja-Chaparro, F., Santín, D. & Simancas, R. "Determinants of grade retention in France and Spain: Does birth month matter?" *Journal of Policy Modeling*, 37.5 (2015): 820–834.
63. Peixoto, F., et al. "'To be or not to be retained... that's the question!' Retention, self-esteem, self-concept, achievement goals, and grades." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7 (2016): 1550.
64. Pellegrini, M., et al. "Effective programs in elementary mathematics: A meta-analysis." *AERA Open*, 7 (2021): 2332858420986211.
65. Pelser, E. "Learning to be lost: Youth crime in South Africa." *Discussion Papers for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Youth Policy Initiative*, (2008): 1–14.
66. Popa, S. "Towards 2030 and beyond: Challenges, constants, and the need to transform education." *PROSPECTS*, (2025): 1–7.
67. Rathmann, K., Loter, K. & Vockert, T. "Critical events throughout the educational career: The effect of grade retention and repetition on school-aged children's well-being." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17.11 (2020): 4012.
68. Rindermann, H. "Why are there differences across German states in student achievement and cognitive ability?" *Heliyon*, 10.3 (2024).
69. Ringrose, P., Kristensen, G. K. & Kjelaas, I. "'Not integrated at all. Whatsoever': Teachers' narratives on the integration of newly arrived refugee students in Norway." *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28.13 (2024): 3158–3175.
70. Rumberger, R. W. "High school dropouts: A review of issues and evidence." *Review of Educational Research*, 57.2 (1987): 101–121.
71. Schechter, R., et al. "Exploration of a blended learning approach to reading instruction for low SES students in early elementary grades." *Computers in the Schools*, 32.3–4 (2015): 183–200.
72. Schroedel, J. & Aslanian, A. "Native American vote suppression: The case of South Dakota." *Race, Gender & Class*, 22.1–2 (2015): 308–323.
73. Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. "Involvement counts: Family and community partnerships and mathematics achievement." *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98.4 (2005): 196–207.
74. Sherwood, C. "Retention in grade: Lethal lessons?" (1993).
75. Silova, I., Johnson, M. S. & Heyneman, S. P. "Education and the crisis of social cohesion in Azerbaijan and Central Asia." *Comparative Education Review*, 51.2 (2007): 159–180.
76. Stevens, P. A. J. & Dworkin, A. G., eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, (2019).

77. Slade, S. & Griffith, D. "A whole child approach to student success." *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy* (2013).
78. Slavin, R. E. "How evidence-based reform will transform research and practice in education." *Educational Psychologist*, 55.1 (2020): 21–31.
79. Slavin, R. E. & Madden, N. A. "What works for students at risk: A research synthesis." *Educational Leadership*, 46.5 (1989): 4–13.
80. Sloan-Toraño, R. "Ramón Pané, las primeras décadas del descubrimiento, el Caribe, mayas, supervivencia biológica nativa, suicidios culturales y botánica." *European Scientific Journal (ESJ)*, 37 (Jan. 2025): 319. <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/19024>.
81. Toraño, R. S. *La fabricación del taíno: Concepto étnico-cultural y desventajas de una nomenclatura para la historia insular caribeña*. Diss. Universitat Jaume I, (2021).
82. Sloan-Toraño, R. "Terms and terminology conflicts of social quandaries engendered by the Taino native fixation: A cultural crisis analytical study in Caribbean contemporary history." *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences*, 5.5 (2018): 243–256.
83. Stearns, E., et al. "Staying back and dropping out: The relationship between grade retention and school dropout." *Sociology of Education*, 80.3 (2007): 210–240.
84. Stewart, J. "Supporting introverted students." *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 11.1 (2019): 47–50.
85. Svirsky, M. "Resistance is a structure not an event." *Settler Colonial Studies*, 7.1 (2017): 19–39.
86. ter Meulen, S. *Long-term effects of grade retention*. CESifo Working Paper No. 10212, (2023).
87. Thackeray, W. W. "The Montana Indian Studies Law: An experiment in legislating ethnic understanding." *Teaching and Writing Local and Reservation History: The Crows* (1995): 120–131.
88. Tokheim, I., et al. *Challenges faced in pioneering practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe*. (2024).
89. Vandecandelaere, M., et al. "The effects of early grade retention: Effect modification by prior achievement and age." *Journal of School Psychology*, 54 (2016): 77–93.
90. Van Canegem, T., Van Houtte, M. & Demanet, J. "Grade retention: A pathway to solitude? A cross-national multilevel analysis of the effects of being retained on students' sense of belonging." *Comparative Education Review*, 66.4 (2022): 664–687.
91. Voß, S. & Blumenthal, Y. "Impacts of the Response-to-Intervention Approach on German elementary students." *International Journal of Technology and Education*, 8.1 (2019): 1347–1355.
92. Voß, S. & Blumenthal, Y. "Assessing the word recognition skills of German elementary students in silent reading—psychometric properties of an item pool to generate curriculum-based measurements." *Education Sciences*, 10.2 (2020): 35.
93. Wildcat, M., McDonald, M., Irlbacher-Fox, S. & Coulthard, G. "Learning from the land: Indigenous land based pedagogy and decolonization." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3.3 (2014).
94. Zhang, S. & Huang, A. "Effects of abolishing grade retention on educational achievement and adult crime." *SSRN Working Paper* (2024).
95. Zhou, L., et al. "'School's out, but class' on', the largest online education in the world today: Taking China's practical exploration during the COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control as an example." *Best Evidence in Chinese Education*, 4.2 (2020): 501–519.

**Source of support:** Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

**Cite this article as:**

Sloan-Toraño, R. "Educational History Notes on Primary School Retention: A Children's Risk and Adversities Literature Review." *Sarcouncil journal of Arts humanities and social sciences* 4.6 (2025): pp 19-36.