

Study supports students not repeating a school year

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A study by the University of Sydney's Professor Andrew Martin, published in this month's issue of the *British Educational Research Journal*, makes new findings of better outcomes for students who do not repeat a school year.

The study looked at the effects of repeating on both academic and social outcomes.

"While much previous research, including a recent OECD study, has concluded that repeat years can disadvantage students' achievement, this is one of the few studies to look at a wider range of factors such as motivation, engagement, peer relationships and self-esteem," Professor Martin, from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, said.

"Many [students](#) repeat [school](#) years because of these issues, not just because of a lack of [academic achievement](#). For this reason the findings are a useful addition to the research and can help parents and educators deciding whether to hit the 'pause button' on a student's education."

Professor Martin's study shows that, in terms of academic factors, repeating a grade predicted a decrease in academic engagement and self-confidence. It indicated a lowering of students' motivation including non-completion of homework and increasing absence from school.

The look at [social factors](#) demonstrated that a repeat year was also associated with a lowering of self-esteem and brought no advantages in

peer relationships, relative to comparable students who did not repeat.

In Australia the percentage of students who repeat years is estimated at between 5 and 15 percent. Some educators have expressed concern that Australia's increased focus on school accountability will lead to higher numbers of students being 'repeated' in the belief it will improve a school's overall performance.

Previous studies have also not controlled for possible moderating factors such as gender, age and ethnicity.

"The implications from this study are that repeating students is not a beneficial strategy, irrespective of whether the student is relatively older or younger in the year group, is male or female, high or low in ability, or of English or non-English-speaking background," Professor Martin said.

"Furthermore, it was found that the grade/age when a student was repeated had no significant association with academic and non-academic outcomes."

The findings support an educational approach which continues to promote students to the next grade while providing those who need it with suitable and targeted educational support. That support could cover motivation and other behavioural issues, greater parental involvement and additional instruction, including for literacy and numeracy.

It supports the view that children will vary in their performances at school but that the range of variation in development should be addressed by a variety of educational responses instead of making students repeat.

The research sample for this study comprised 3261 high school students from six Australian schools. The article appears in *British Educational*

Research Journal, volume 37, number 5, October 2011.

Provided by University of Sydney

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