



## Navigating Educational Landscapes: Predictors and effects of grade retention

E-CER founding date: 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2024

### **E-CER Scope:**

Within any given class in primary and secondary education, there is typically considerable variation among students. This heterogeneity (especially in terms of achievement) challenges educational practitioners and policy makers in their attempts to guarantee high educational standards and raises the question how to deal with it. In many European countries, students who are not keeping up with their peers or who do not meet a certain predefined achievement level, are requested to repeat their grade, instead of being promoted to the next grade (Eurydice, 2020). More specifically, in 2018, about 1 student out of 3 (Luxembourg), 4 (Portugal, Spain, Belgium), 5 (Germany), or 6 (the Netherlands, Switzerland, France) had been retained at least once by age 15 (Eurydice, 2020), which equals millions of European students per year. Strong beliefs among practitioners about the effectiveness of grade retention for remedial purposes play an important role in this matter.

Research on the effects of grade retention on repeaters' development, in a variety of countries across the world, however, has revealed this practice to be non-effective. At the same time, research on the predictors of grade retention has shown grade repeaters to be more often low-SES students, ethnic minority students, and disabled students, even keeping student achievement constant, suggesting this practice to be highly unfair.

Yet, there is still a lot of controversy among researchers about the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches used. Moreover, some grade retention topics have hardly been studied so far: effects of grade retention on repeaters' classmates' development,



grade retention decision-making processes, mediation and moderation processes and implementation of remedial alternatives in practice. This E-CER wants to address these gaps with the following collaborative activities:

- Investigation of grade retention beliefs, practices, predictors, effects, and alternatives in 4 different countries (Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium)
- Dissemination, evaluation and adaptation of tools currently constructed by the E-CER team to ease school teams and teachers in applying alternatives for grade retention (on-going Erasmus+)
- Development of several collaborative research proposals for international funding (e.g., WEAVE, Horizon, Erasmus+)

### **E-CER Members:**



#### **Barbara Belfi**

PhD in Educational Sciences from KU Leuven, is a senior researcher at the Research Centre of Education and the Labour Market at Maastricht University. Her research primarily focuses on the interplay between school environments and significant societal challenges. Central to her work is addressing the increasing diversity within student populations, where she advocates for inclusive and equitable learning strategies. Additionally, she explores the degree to which schools prepare their students with the skills necessary to function optimally in today's and tomorrow's world. Furthermore, she is a member of the EU-funded project Alter – Alternatives for Retention, further underscoring her commitment to innovative educational solutions.



### **Jannick Demanet**

PhD in Sociology (Ghent University) is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, Ghent University, Belgium, and member of the research team CuDOS. He researches school- and system-level effects on non-cognitive outcomes and educational careers, particularly grade retention and higher education. He teaches general sociology courses and in sociology of education, and in research methods. He is vice-coordinator of RN10 (Sociology of Education) of the European Sociological Association (ESA) and the coordinator of the International Study of City Youth for Ghent, Belgium.



### **Paul Fabian**

Doctor of Education (Centre for Education and School Development, TU Dortmund University). His doctoral thesis was on the effects of grade retention on various cognitive outcomes. He is a senior researcher in the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) and was the operative coordinator of NEPS Stage 4 ("From Lower to Upper Secondary School"). His methodological expertise lies in longitudinal research methods and causal analysis. He is interested in all facets of grade retention and social and educational inequality.



### **Sérgio Gaitas**

PhD in Educational Psychology (ISPA-Instituto Universitário) and Educational Sciences (Toulouse II Le Mirail), is Assistant Professor at ISPA, teaching and conducting research in Inclusive Education and Differentiated Instruction. He is also a member of the Center for Research in Education (CIE-ISPA). He served as a Pedagogical Supervisor for several years in a school cluster and is a member of the EU-funded project Alter – Alternatives for Retention.



### **Mieke Goos**

PhD in Educational Sciences (KULeuven), is a researcher at the Centre for Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation (KULeuven) and the Centre Art of Teaching (UCLL). Her research interests include student development, professional learning and educational effectiveness, particularly in primary education. She was/is member and leader of project teams funded by EU (Alter) and the Flemish Department of Education (SSL, OBPWO, STEP).



### **Florian Klapproth**

Born 1971. 1993-1999 studied psychology in Göttingen. 1999-2003 research assistant at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Hildesheim. 2003 PhD. 2003-2009 university assistant at the Institute of Psychology and Ergonomics at the Technical University of Berlin. 2010 Habilitation. 2009-2014 head of a research project at the Faculté des Lettres, des Sciences Humaines, des Arts et des Sciences de l'Éducation of the University of Luxembourg. 2014-2015 substitute professor of educational psychology at the Institute of Psychology at the Ludwigsburg University. 2015 substitute professor of educational psychology at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Marburg. Since 2015 full professor of educational psychology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Medical School Berlin. Main research topics: diagnostic judgment, educational aspirations, psychology of time.



### **Fabian Meissner**

M.Sc. in Psychology, is a PhD candidate at the Medical School Berlin, focusing on education, educational inequalities, grade retention, and public health. He contributes to the EU-funded project 'Alter – Alternatives for Retention', aiming to reduce grade retention in schools.



### **Francisco Peixoto**

PhD in Educational Psychology (University of Minho) is an Associate Professor at ISPA. He teaches courses in Educational Psychology, Psychology of Learning and Motivation, and Research Methods in Education. He also serves as the Coordinator of the Center for Research in Education (CIE-ISPA). His primary research interests include motivational and emotional processes in learning, the development of self-concept in school contexts, factors related to underachievement, teacher resilience and well-being, and factors affecting students' adaptation to higher education. He has been a member and/or leader of project teams funded by FCT (Portuguese National Science Foundation), the EU (e.g., ENTREE, HOPEs, SUnStar, Alter and ProSTEAM), and the Research Council of Norway (MathMot).



### **Janneke Pepels**

Is a PhD candidate at Maastricht University at the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). Her areas of interest include grade retention, grade acceleration, well-being, and psychosocial development. She is a member of the EU funded project Alter – Alternatives for Retention.



### **Joana Pipa**

PhD in Educational Psychology (Ispa-Instituto Universitário) is a researcher at the Center for Research in Education (CIE- ISPA), and Lecturer at Ispa-Instituto Universitário, where she teaches Educational Psychology, and Research Methods in Education courses. Her research areas of interest include grade retention and students' affective components of learning, in particular, students' self-concept, motivation, engagement, and well-being. Her PhD was about the effects of grade retention on middle school students' self-concept, motivation, and engagement. She is a member of the EU funded project Alter – Alternatives for Retention.



### **Timo Van Canegem**

PhD in Sociology (Gent University), is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology, Ghent University, Belgium, and member of the research team CuDOS. In addition, he is Guest Professor at the teacher education department of Vrije Universiteit Brussel. He studies the determinants and non-cognitive outcomes of grade retention, both from a Flemish and a cross-national perspective.