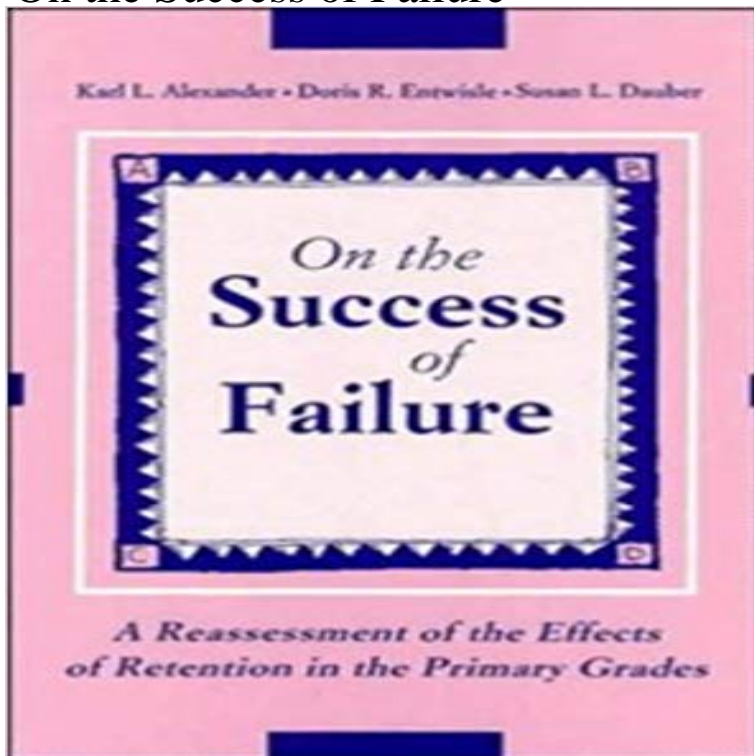


On the Success of Failure



This book is about the practice of grade retention in elementary school, a particularly vexing problem in urban school systems, where upwards of half the students may repeat a grade. On the Success of Failure addresses the question of whether repeating a grade is helpful or harmful when children are not keeping up. It describes the school context of retention and evaluates its consequences by tracking the experiences of a large, representative sample of Baltimore school children from first grade through middle school. Focusing on the experience of first, second and third grade repeaters, the volume finds largely positive effects for retention. Test scores and marks, which are low to begin with and get worse over time, improve when retainees get back into the regular promotion sequence, but in most instances repeaters remain above where they had been before being held back. Retention is not the answer to childrens problems, but neither is it the source of problems, as much commentary on the practice would have us believe. On the Success of Failure gives evidence that a return to social promotion would be the real disservice to these youngsters and their families.

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