Looping: an alternative to grade level promotions

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Abstract
This research paper is a study of looping. The purpose of this study was to conduct a review and an analysis of the literature concerning looping. Three questions were asked in the study: 1. What is looping and how does looping differ from multi-age grouping? 2. What are the advantages and disadvantages in looping? 3. What are the guidelines for an effective looping arrangement? The definition of looping was discussed as well as the advantages and disadvantages of looping. Guidelines for an effective looping arrangement were presented. Summary, conclusions, and recommendations were shared with readers.
Looping:
An Alternative to Grade Level Promotions

A Graduate Review
Submitted to the
Division of Early Childhood Education
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by
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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In times of school reform and when school districts are seeking greater school effectiveness, administrators, along with teachers and parents, need to look at options for restructuring our schools. One innovative way to restructure schools is to do away with rigid grade levels.

... research on school effectiveness has consistently suggested that long-term relationships improve both student performance and job satisfaction for teachers. Yet, despite these findings, meaningful discussion of long-term teacher/student relationships is scarce in our nation's school, and implementation is rare enough to be regarded as exceptional. (Burke, 1996, p. 360)

One way of establishing long-term relationships is having the same teacher stay with a class for more than one year. This long-term relationship is called looping.

Background of the Study

The concept of looping has been around since the time of one-room schoolhouses. One-room schools were used in the United States in the 1600s. In them, students of all ages were grouped together. For example, the dame schools of the seventeenth century did not have grades, and children of ages three to ten studied together (Small, 1914). The children of the dame schools received individualized instruction.

The eighteenth century schools were called district schools. The teacher and school moved to where students were in their district. Teachers taught only what they knew, for they were poorly trained as few teachers were college educated (Goodland & Anderson, 1987).

Also in the eighteenth century, Boston had different reading and writing schools for boys and girls (Goodland & Anderson, 1974). Boys went to one school, and girls
went to another school. In some schools, boys and girls would switch schools in the middle of the day. During this time, some buildings had separate reading and writing floors. Children at designated grade levels had to learn specific things in subject matter, and they also had to master required skills.

As the population in the United States grew in the mid-nineteenth century, so did the schools' enrollments. Schools were organized in an efficient, orderly, and structured manner. This resulted in a single grade approach, for teachers would help students learn the required material at one grade level before moving on to the next grade level. An academic year was the time in which students were organized into smaller groups, called grade levels. These grade levels were based on children's age. This move from one-room schools to the single-age and the grade level classroom came into practice in the mid-1800s. Horace Mann of Massachusetts introduced and developed the single grade classrooms idea to the United States, for he brought back this idea from his visit to Prussia (Germany) in 1843. An outcome of this grade level concept was the Quincy Grammar School in Boston, founded in 1848. This school "... became not the first, but by far the most remarkable example, after which thousands of elementary schools were patterned" (Anderson & Pavan, 1993, p.2).

Over the years five major developments have influenced gradedness (Goodland & Anderson, 1987). These major developments are the following:

(1) the movement toward public, state-supported education; (2) the practical success and astonishing economy of the monitorial system; (3) the several appeals of the German education as interpreted by American spokesmen; (4) the call for trained teachers, answered in part by the founding of state-supported normal school; and (5) the appearance of graded schoolbooks in all areas of instruction. (p. 48)

Previously, only the rich could afford to send their children to school. Horace Mann, Secretary of the Massachusetts School Board, strived for educational reform. Mann stated on many occasions that to improve education the public would need to
give its financial and moral support. Mann's reform proposals were stated in his reports to the people. Mann interpreted the Law of 1647 as universal and free education. However, girls were not admitted to district schools until the Law of 1789.

In his reform Mann pushed for the abolition of small district schools. Also, he urged the development of centralized town schools. Centralized town schools were to be better-supported than the small district schools. The development of independent state systems of educations, based on the German school system, came from this reform. Establishment of the free school idea resulted in the abolition of tuition in public schools, and the movement toward public, state-supported education.

In some schools the monitorial system was used. The monitorial system involved a master teacher who taught a lesson to the older, sometimes brighter students. These students then became monitors. Monitors were responsible for specific jobs of the school, such as teaching other students and taking attendance.

Teacher preparation became an issue in the late eighteenth century. Teachers needed to be educated to meet the demands of the graded educational system and to learn the specialized teaching methods introduced from Europe. Thus, normal schools were founded to train teachers. Private normal schools were introduced in America by Samuel Hall in 1823 and by James G. Carter in 1827. In 1839, Massachusetts opened the first public normal school.

The textbook revolution also influenced gradedness. In 1821 the Warren Colburn arithmetic text was produced, and in 1836 the McGuffey Eclectic Readers served as reading textbooks for different grade levels (Goodland & Anderson, 1987). "it is suggested that one reason that gradedness became popular was the development of graded material such as the McGuffey reading series, five separate readers following one another in levels of difficulty" (Daniel & Terry, 1995, p. 7).

During this time, teachers became better educated and began to specialize in a
content area, or at a specific grade level. Accordingly, the curricula were developed at each grade level, and students were expected to learn the content at a grade level before they were promoted to the next, higher grade.

In the early 1900s, Rudolf Steiner, Austrian educator and philosopher, founded the Waldorf Schools in which looping is practiced (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). In Waldorf Schools, or called Steiner Schools, looping is done in grades one through eight and a teacher stays with the same class throughout these grades. To this point, Olgetree (1974) stated the following:

The pupil-teacher relationship is a significant feature of the Waldorf approach. The class teacher, who takes over the class in first grade, follows the class throughout the elementary grades. Thus, he can form a personal relationship with each pupil in the order of a third parent. (p. 346)

Originally, Waldorf schools were developed for children of employees who worked in the cigarette factory in Stuttgart Germany. Today, over 500 Waldorf Schools are located in thirty-five countries (Newberg, 1995).

Schools in the United States have tried looping in different ways. Some schools have looping classrooms for all children; whereas, other schools have a looping option available for two grade levels. In some schools two teachers have convinced their principal of letting them do looping, while other districts have formed committees and have proposed the concept of looping to their public and their school board. Numerous schools and school systems are mentioned in the literature as having tried, or now are trying looping. Some of these schools are the following: Grant Elementary School in Livonia, Michigan; Attleboro, Massachusetts; District 34 in Antioch, Illinois; Orchard Lake Middle School in West Bloomfield, Minnesota.

In 1974, looping first appeared in New York. A teacher named Deborah Meier, who is a former principal of Central Park East Elementary School in New York City, said that looping was a component of her ideal school (Hanson, 1995). Joseph
Rappa, Superintendent of Attleboro School System in Massachusetts, piloted looping in the 1980's (Hanson, 1995). It is now required in grades one through eight in the Attleboro School System and a teacher stays with the same class for two years.

According to Assistant Superintendent Theodore Thibodeau, by fall of 1994 the two-year teacher/student relationship model in Attleboro will have 100% staff participation in grades 1 through 8, and district officials will begin phasing in a similar arrangement in grades 9 through 12. (Burke, 1996, p. 361)

Today, looping is common in Europe and in Japan. It is also used in some Montessori schools, for children may stay with the same teacher for many years, depending upon the looping plan. In Japan and in Israel, looping is practiced in the lower grades and is called family grouping. The Japanese and Israeli looping secondary schools involve a teacher teaching in a content area such as science.

In German elementary schools today, students are grouped heterogeneously in the first grade and stay with the same teacher for the next four years. In German middle schools, teams of six to eight teachers stay with the same students in grades five through ten. German schools have had a constructivist perspective in that theories and ideas are more important than facts and statistics in the learning process (Zahorik, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a review and an analysis of the literature concerning how looping is used in schools. In order to achieve this purpose the following questions will be addressed:

1. What is looping and how does looping differ from multi-age grouping?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages in looping?
3. What are the guidelines for an effective looping arrangement?
Need for the Study

In recent years, more and more attention has been given to looping in professional publications; press coverages, and at educational conferences. Also, looping recently has been implemented in many schools in the U.S. and other countries. Daniel L. Burke (1996), Superintendent of School District 34 in Antioch Illinois, expressed a need for the looping arrangement when he wrote: “... multi-year teacher/student relationships are still uncommon in U.S. schools. But research findings and the enthusiasm of participants in multi-year relationships suggest that the arrangement merits serious discussion and widespread piloting” (p. 361). There is little statistical research on looping, and thus a need for researchers or teachers to do quantitative and qualitative research is suggested.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is my lack of access to recent literature. Although the concept of looping has been used in the past, limited research has been done concerning it. This lack of research is based on the fact that the term looping has just recently resurfaced in educational literature.

Definition of Terms

For this paper, the following terms will be defined:

grouping-- in a traditional graded school system, the way a group of students is arranged or divided for the next school year as a class

looping--students of a class and the teacher stay together for at least two years.

Other terms used for looping are multiple year assignments, multiyear assignments, multi-year classes, multi-year education, multi-year grouping, multiyear teaching, and teacher/student progression.
multi-age--having two or more grades and four or more chronological ages in one classroom. The same teacher usually teaches a multi-age classroom for more than one year. One-half to one-third of the students of a particular class move in and out each year. In Vermont, many schools are multi-age.

the twenty-month classroom--the same as the looping definition (see looping). In a traditional two years of schooling equaling eighteen months, looping for two years gives two extra months of teaching time thus creating twenty months of school-two extra teaching months, not calendar wise but in the classroom.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Looping in its Full Use

The term looping has been popularized by Jim Grant, who is director of the Society for Developmental Education in Peterborough, New Hampshire. (NAESP Communicator, 1996) Looping is not a new classroom program, and it has been given many different names in the literature. Looping is a term used synonymously with multi-year classroom. The term looping can also be called multi-year education, multiyear teaching, multi-year grouping, multiyear assignments, multiple year assignments, multi-year classes, teacher/student progression, and the twenty-month classroom. For this study, the term looping will be used.

Looping is a simple idea, concept, structure, practice and is a grouping strategy. Looping is the practice of allowing teachers to stay with the same students for two or more years, thus the teacher is promoted to the next grade with the students. For example, a kindergarten teacher would follow her current class to first grade in the following school year. Ideally, the first grade teacher would move to teach kindergarten and start teaching a new class. Grant et al., (1996) described looping as follows:

A teacher decides that, instead of spending one year with a class of children, she wants to spend two, or sometimes three, so she talks the teacher in the next grade into dropping back to her present grade level, and moves to the next grade along with her kids. (p. 15)

Differences of Looping and Multi-age

The terms looping and multi-age need not be confused. There is a difference. Looping in not a multi-age classroom. In a multi-age practice a group of students move in and out of the classroom each year; however, a core group of students could
stay in the same class. The students in a looping classroom stay intact although some new students arrive because of moving in to the school district, or for other reasons. Looping classrooms have a smaller age and ability range compared to multi-age classrooms of two or more grade and age levels combined in one classroom. Looping classrooms are single-graded.

Implementing multi-age classrooms and multi-age programs involve much work. Planning time and the energy involved in multi-age programs are extensive. In comparison to looping as mentioned in the advantages under the school/building principal/administrative advantages, looping does not involve a lot of planning nor is it difficult to implement. Looping is easier to try than multi-age and only takes two willing teachers and a principal to reassign those teachers to different grade levels in order to do a looping classroom. (Grant et al., 1996)

Advantages and Disadvantages of Looping

Advantages

There are many reasons why school systems and educators choose looping, for it can be an alternative to other grouping options within a school system. There are many reasons in favor of looping, but the focal point of looping is the establishment of a relationship. This relationship exists among students, teachers, parents, other teachers, and an accepted curriculum.

Student Advantages

Long-term relationships are built in a stable, secure, and predictable environment. A looping classroom becomes like a family unit--classroom and school have a family atmosphere feeling. Developed from the long-term relationship, the teacher is referred to as a third parent in which the teacher is a significant adult in the lives of children. Chip Wood, author of Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom, ages four to 12 (1996), stated the following:
Our experience indicates that the most important variable in a positive elementary school program is the constant attention of a single teacher/caregiver with whom the child can develop a predictable and meaningful relationship. As children reach the ages of eleven and twelve, peers become more important and teacher less important to children. But especially in these first stages of independence, children need one teacher as an anchor, as well as an object for rebellion. (Grant et al., p. 15)

The children rely upon the support and guidance. When staying with the same teacher for more than one year, there is security and comfort established which help in the learning process.

Students of a looping classroom have positive attitudes about learning. Connections are made during learning. Diana Mazzuchi and Nancy Brooks (1992) who have taught looping for three two-year cycles, said, “The opportunities to make personal connections with others and with ideas over time are especially valuable for emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 60). Socially and academically, a child has greater continuity in experiences. Zahorik and Dichanz (1994) stated, “Further, multi-year grouping, because it permits students to get to know one another well, facilitates social construction of knowledge” (p. 75). Student performance is increased based upon the long-term relationship. A social construction of knowledge is built in groups and individuals help one another and gain more of a greater understanding. Students acknowledge growth of others in the classroom as well as establishing an identity in what may seem as a large institutionalized setting. Social skills in the second year involve resolving conflicts and problems and working as a team. The class learns to cooperate quickly. This problem-solving also carries over to the playground. Grant (1996) claimed “that the practice results in . . . fewer discipline problems” (p. 7). Joe Rappa (1996), Superintendent of Attleboro, Massachusetts school district, advocated the use of looping in first through eighth grades, and in his school district four hundred teachers are involved in looping. He stated that, “Discipline and suspensions, especially at the middle schools (grades 5 through 8), have declined significantly” (p.
Children are able to deal with issues in a stronger and more supportive way. The climate of a looping classroom encourages thinking, risk-taking, and involvement. The long-term relationships are emotionally and intellectually established. Relationships can more readily mature and deepen with the extended time.

Looping encourages learning over the summer months as the teacher can carefully give guidelines for summer work and projects. Donald Skidmore (1996), Superintendent of District 34 in Antioch, Illinois, piloted looping in the fall of 1994.

In Skidmore's view, multi-year teacher/student relationships also offer tremendous potential for summertime learning, because teachers can assign reading lists and high-interest projects to students at the end of the school year and then review and reinforce their efforts when they return in the fall. (p. 361)

Looping teachers also can make an effort to correspond with students during the summer between the first year and second year of looping. At the end of the first year students are not afraid of the unknown, of not knowing who their teacher or classmates are going to be over the summer. Parents of students who had finished their first year of looping and are ready to start the second year of looping have commented that their child had a relaxed summer because he or she knew who the teacher was going to be. There is less anxiety for the students. At the start of the second year, students know their classmates and the rules of the classroom. Children know their teacher and the expectations; there are limited pre-school jitters. Transitions are eased from one school year to the next. Grant (1996) observed "... that looping cuts transitions in half and creates stability and routine, thus increasing overall mental health" (p. 7). The second year involves less anxious children because the same teacher is teaching the student for a second year. This is security and familiarity for the child.

Children do not learn in the same way, or even at the same pace. The second year enables a student to relate activities and experiences from last year to the present. Information can carry over and a student can make connections. Two
teachers teaching at the Academy School in Brattleboro, Vermont, stated, “A child’s
development is seen in a less fragmented way and in a more natural setting when it
occurs over time.” (Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992, p. 60) Retention and special education
referrals are critical decisions that in the looping situation are wisely postponed. The
Attleboro, Massachusetts school district noted that retention rates have decreased by
over 43 percent in grades 2 through 8 and special education referrals have decreased
by over 55 percent (Grant et. al., 1996).

Several authors have observed that looping enhances shy and quiet children.
“Two years in the same class also works wonders with children who are shy. We’ve
had numerous students come out of their shell in the second year because they felt
confident about themselves and secure within the group” (Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992, p.
60). A Chicago, Illinois teacher said,

The two year sequence benefited the shy, quiet children tremendously as well.
There always seem to be one or two children who rarely talk in class, although their
parents say they they are never quiet at home. Those children grew increasingly
comfortable in the classroom, and by the middle of the second year, came fully out of
their shells; as our time together increased, school simulated the comfort and intimacy
of home and family. (Jacoby, 1994, p. 59)

Burke (1996) reported on a study of a group of teachers who had taught their same
class for three years that “... 69% described their students as more willing to
participate voluntarily in class” (p. 360). Gaining confidence is a benefit experienced
by quiet and shy children during the looping program.

Teacher advantages.

By the beginning of the second year, teachers get to know how each and every
student learns. Teachers will understand a student’s way of learning, behaviors,
ability, interests, emotional stability, and social skills; they grasp the student’s
knowledge of school learning and how it develops, but looping teachers also know
knowledge of school learning and how it develops, but looping teachers also know their students' backgrounds and families. Thus, teachers have time to plan appropriately for the child. Activities, materials, resources, and the assistance needed can be incorporated in this planning process. An advantage to teachers is that the profession of a teacher is seen as a teacher of children, not as a teacher of a specific grade level or content area. By knowing and understanding this information about the child, a teacher has an advantage and thus can build upon it. Some children take most of the year for a teacher to figure out. By keeping those children for another year it is helpful to the teacher in knowing what some children need in order to learn.

Deborah Jacoby (1994), a teacher in Chicago, Illinois, said: “By the second year, I was able to offer more constructive criticism on the students’ academic work without damaging our relationship. They already knew that I believed in them and in their cognitive abilities and they trusted my instincts” (p. 59).

To teachers, the satisfaction is seen in students’ growth and the assessment of growth, and changes over a longer period of time—not nine or ten months. An extra teaching month is gained. A month of review is not needed. There is less review and less adjustment and getting to know children at the start of the second year. Learning begins on day one of the second year. The second year orientation takes minutes not a month. Time on task in the classroom is increased. Continuity and familiarity are already established. Teaching a child for two years gives teachers enough time to connect with the child’s learning styles. The teacher will know the children’s learning style, strengths, weaknesses, interest, and home situation. Knowing a child’s skills and concepts, a teacher can help carry over the information to make connections. There is a longer length of time for each child to build on prior knowledge to develop the attitudes and behavior for maximum learning. Barbara J. Hanson (1995) stated in the article Getting to Know You--Multiyear Teaching “... with two years to nurture and
reflect upon our students and our instructional objectives, we can be certain that our instruction will be constructivist, or child-centered, rather than curriculum-centered" (p. 43).

Teachers committed to the concept of looping are dedicated. Staff attendance at the Attleboro, Massachusetts School System has improved markedly from an average of seven days absent per staff member per year, to less than three (Grant et al., 1996). Another advantage of looping is that job satisfaction is increased for teachers.

**Parent/family advantages.**

A teacher advantage in getting to know students is also that of getting to know parents and families of the students. Parents understand the school program by the second year and they know the teacher and teaching philosophy, methods and style and the way it applies to children. They are more comfortable with the teacher. In one study, eighty-four percent of the teachers reported more positive relationships with parents (Burke, 1996). That same study also found “... 99% of parents requested the same teacher to whom their child had been assigned during the previous year." (p. 361) Not only are relationships built with teacher and student, but parents also feel a strong support for the program and are involved. Parents may become volunteers and help in fund-raising situations.

**School district/building/administrative advantages.**

Looping costs very little. Two willing teachers are needed to implement looping, and the approval from a principal to try the concept. Physical space and more room are not needed. Teachers need no extensive training. Extensive planning, substantial research, and lead time are not needed. Looping is very versatile. It will work at all and any grade levels.
Time spent on repetitious tasks is eliminated. There are not class lists to develop at the end of the school year for the next years in which looping will occur.

The school board will not look at looping as a serious change. A lot of in-depth planning and research are not necessary. The school will not be pressured from school reform oppositioners because looping can be implemented quietly and easily. A principal's job will not be put at risk for implementing the idea of looping.

Disadvantages

However, there are reasons why looping would not work. Looping is not for everyone and should not be forced on unwilling staff. Looping disadvantages affect students as well as teachers.

Student Disadvantages

The bond developed in the looping relationship and separation at the end of a looping situation may be difficult and stressful for some children. Students are also limited in making new friends if they are grouped with the same class for two years or longer. Personality conflicts between teacher and student may be harmful if a student is mismatched for two or more years. Also, learning styles of children may not be met in some instances by teachers. Teaching and learning styles are not always a match. It is unfair to leave a student in this situation for two or more years. Disadvantages to students are that "the multiyear classroom may mask a learning disability" (Grant et al., 1996, p. 100). Allan S. Vann (1997), principal, stated that "... there is no body of research supporting greater cognitive or affective growth in children who have experienced it" (p. 41).

Teachers have strengths and weaknesses and there are poor and marginally performing teachers; this may not be beneficial to particular students. A student may be stuck with a weak teacher; however, experts say that weak teachers do not usually volunteer for jobs such as would be involved in looping.
The way a teacher views the curriculum may not be beneficial to the child who opts out of the looping plan in the second year. If a teacher decides to teach one grade level curriculum area the following year, then the child who opted out and the new students to the class in the second year miss out on that particular curriculum. Children who are ridiculed and labeled as too fat or too smart by other children may have two or more years of negative consequences—an unfair situation. Time may be lost at the start of the second year of looping for the students as the teacher strives to learn the new grade curriculum. The effects of looping may have disadvantages for some students, but the teachers also may be affected.

Teacher Disadvantages.

Teacher disadvantages are also seen in the implementation of looping. A teacher would have to learn a new curriculum for the new grade level that he or she will be teaching after the present grade level completion, and in this move to a new grade level, special training may be needed for such programs as Drug Abuse Resistant Education, (DARE). Time will be essential in learning the new curriculum. Often the higher the grade level, the more content area there is to learn. Also, the move to a new grade level may be a grade of high pressure, such as first grade with its focus on learning to read. This grade level may not be child-centered in its philosophy. The teacher must learn the the development stages and ages of the new grade level students. Jim Grant, Bob Johnson, and Char Forsten (1996) stated that teachers may move to a grade with mandated testing, curriculum content, and promotional standards. Moving to the next grade level may require an increase in class size, and one may lose help in the classroom - the teaching assistant or associate.

Teacher established relationships may suffer in looping. The separation at the end of two or more years bonding with a student can be emotionally difficult for a
of a building, may create separation from other teachers in which friendships were established. A teacher may not want to leave a team he or she has worked on that is working well together. Since change is difficult, a teacher may feel comfortable and may think that it is easier to teach the same grade year after year.

As with the student disadvantage, a personality clash with a child may also be a teacher disadvantage. Teachers may have to teach the same problem or difficult children two or more years. Also teaching and learning style differences are unfair to teachers for a second year. The characteristics of the class also determine their learning potential. The class make-up may be dysfunctional and difficult. Thus, an unbalanced classroom is created. In working with parents who are difficult, hateful, and a problem, the long-term effects of dealing in this situation for two or more years may be stressful.
CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LOOPING

Guidelines are necessary in the implementation of looping. Everyone involved needs to realize that looping can be positive, or it can be negative. However, the majority of the disadvantages of looping can be reduced, if certain precautions are taken.

Planning is necessary for looping to be implemented successfully. This planning involves knowledge. Teachers, administrators, principals, and parents need to read and obtain as much information and literature as possible regarding the topic of looping. It is also advisable to visit a practicing looping classroom or school and to ask a lot of questions.

Teacher Guidelines

1. It is recommended that looping be voluntary.

Teachers volunteer to stay with the same class for more than one year, and parents and students who wish to be a member of a looping classroom must also volunteer. In addition, it is necessary to find a teacher who teaches a grade above or below you who is interested in the concept of looping, and who is willing to work with parents and establish long-term relationships with students. However, any problems between the two teachers must be worked out before implementation. Some situations may arise during and after implementation in which teachers' minds are changed for various reasons. An example may be where one teacher does not want to loop again after the first year. Another example includes a teacher wanting to stay at the new looped grade level if the grade level is different from the one the teacher had previously taught. Perhaps the teacher particularly liked the grade level and curriculum. Any concerns may need to be addressed in a contract and signed by the teachers and principal.
2. A teacher must be committed to the idea of looping and give input when keeping the same class for more than one year. Teacher input is a must. Students' learning styles should be matched with teaching styles. This is essential for the learning potential of a class. Also, teachers must look at the curriculum as one grade at a time each year. Otherwise important pieces of the scope and sequence of instruction may be lost.

3. Teachers do not need to implement new teaching strategies. Vann (1997) said, looping's "success or failure has not been shown to be dependent on its environment, be it structured or unstructured, teacher-centerd or child-centered. Attempts to web looping to a particular learning environment should be discouraged" (p. 42).

Principal/School Guidelines

Also, principals need to be aware of guidelines for looping implementation.

1. Basically, to start looping a principal needs to give his or her approval and reassign staff.

Most principals, by giving notice to the superintendent and school board, have the authority to reassign teachers in their schools. Giving support to teachers who are willing to try looping is necessary. However, a first year teacher should not be expected to be involved with looping. A first year teacher needs time to become established. Principals need to know that some mismatches, whether it be a student-teacher mismatch, student-students, or a parent-teacher mismatch, must be remedied.

2. The make-up and size of the class is also a consideration in the implementation of looping for principals.

For example, neither place all the gifted students or special needs children in the looping classroom. Looping classrooms should have as many students as in other classrooms and contain about the same number of gifted and special needs students.
The numbers and needs of students in a classroom should be comparable to other classrooms. Grant et al. (1996) stressed that in keeping the same class for two or more years, one must look at the importance of the class. They recommend that certain characteristics should be considered when a principal is balancing a classroom: gender, ability levels, racial and cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds, and special needs. These areas are important in creating a diverse and manageable classroom.

3. The administration, and teachers as well, should not name the looping classroom as something special and compare it to other classrooms.

Looping is another option and this should be stressed by all involved.

4. Even though implementing looping is inexpensive and easy, funds for a sufficient staff development should be established.

Looping teachers may need to get training in needed areas such as grade level requirements of the curriculum. The funding may also be appropriate for visiting looping schools and classrooms and to attend workshops on looping.

Parent Guidelines

1. Parents need to have the option to request that their child be removed from the looping classroom.

Parents play an important part in their children's education. If parents are not pleased, or have concerns with their children's looping arrangement, the parent's decision to allow or not to allow their children to continue in the looping classroom must be an option.

Curriculum/Instructional Guidelines

1. A teacher should know the curriculum of the grade levels in which looping could occur.

Viewing the curriculum will allow the teacher to see the requirements of the
looping grade levels. However, the need for flexibility in requirements may occur with some students; these students need more time to meet curriculum requirements. The two year looping plan could provide the necessary time.

2. Teachers may also need to try new instructional strategies and practices.

Some instructional strategies and practices are natural to the environment of looping. Grant, Johnson, and Forsten (1996) recommended that looping teachers should be comfortable with the following curriculum elements: cooperative learning, conflict resolution, literature-based reading, temporary spelling, writing process, learning centers, theme teaching, learning/reading styles, multiple intelligences, authentic assessment, manipulative math, and hands-on science/social studies.
CHAPTER 4
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to examine how looping came about and is critiqued in the current literature. The literature review addressed these questions:

1. What is looping and how does looping differ from multi-age grouping?

Looping is defined as a situation in which a teacher stays with a class for two or more consecutive years. The curriculum is taught consecutively of each grade level each looping year.

Looping is not multi-age grouping. Looping classes are single-graded; multi-age grouping in not single-graded. Looping classes stay together for two or more years. Looping involves less planning time to implement than multi-age grouping.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages in looping?

There are numerous advantages found in the literature. The establishment of long-term relationships among students, teachers, parents, other teachers, and the curriculum is the major advantage of looping. Due to the establishment of this long-term relationship, students of looping classrooms grow emotionally, intellectually, socially, and academically. Transition periods from one year to the next year of looping arrangements are lessened and thus more learning time takes place. Learning connections are made from one year of the looping classroom to the following year. Shy and quiet children benefit from the stability and familiarity of a looping classroom.
Teacher advantages of looping include getting to know how each student learns and learning about the students' backgrounds. In being familiar with each student, teachers see greater growth of learning and curriculum objectives. Also, teachers involved in looping claim job satisfaction and miss less days of work.

Parents and families build relationships in a looping arrangement - an advantage of looping. Parents understand the teacher and teacher's philosophy. Parents are comfortable in the looping arrangement.

An advantage to school districts is that looping does not cost a lot to implement. In-depth planning and research is not necessary, schools can implement looping easily.

However, disadvantages are also noted but are fewer in number and appear to be manageable if handled appropriately. A student disadvantage is that students of the looping class may not have the opportunity to make new friends. Some children of the looping class may have an emotionally difficult time separating from the looping class and looping teacher at the end of the looping arrangement. Learning styles and personality conflicts with teacher and student may be mismatched. This is a disadvantage to the student and teacher.

Teacher disadvantages are evident in looping too. A teacher disadvantage of looping is that the teacher would have to learn a new grade level curriculum. The students may be at a disadvantage at the start of the school year as the teacher is learning the new curriculum. In the teacher's move to a new grade level due to looping, the teacher possibly will have to change rooms and be separated from co-workers in which the teacher has established relationships. Emotionally, the teacher may feel difficulty in ending the bond established with students after the looping arrangement is completed.
3. What are the guidelines for an effective looping arrangement?

Guidelines for implementing a looping arrangement are for teachers, principals and schools, parents, and the curriculum and instruction. Looping needs to be voluntary to the teachers. The teachers involved in looping need to be willing and interested in looping. Teachers do not need to try new teaching strategies, but must give input and accept the curriculum one year at a time.

Principals have the authority to give approval to reassign teachers and to implement a looping arrangement in their schools. Guidelines for principals include giving support and not expecting a first year teacher to loop. Also, a principal must remedy certain situations and circumstances which may occur in the looping arrangement. Principals, as a guideline, must balance our classrooms according to make-up and size in comparison to the other classes in his or her school. The school and/or principal should not give the looping classes a different or unique name.

Other guidelines in the looping arrangement involve parents and teaching the curriculum. Parents need to have the option to allow or not to allow his or her child to be part of the looping classroom. Teachers should know the grade level curriculum of the grades involved in their looping classes. In getting to know a new grade level as a teacher, one may have to try new practices and strategies of teaching.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on this research paper:

1. There are more advantages than disadvantages to using looping. The advantages of looping outweigh the disadvantages. Looping is worth trying by school systems.

2. Certain guidelines need to be taken into consideration when implementing looping. Any guidelines would need to include: teacher guidelines, principal/school guidelines, parent guidelines, and curriculum/instructional guidelines.
Recommendations

Based upon this research paper, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. More research needs to be done in the area of looping.
2. The guidelines suggested in the literature review are to be used only as guidelines and not as specific steps or procedures.
3. The advantages of looping are worth the time and effort it takes to implement this form of grouping organization.
4. Looping should be tried in different educational settings.
5. Different formats of looping should be tried. For example, the looping arrangement could be done with a kindergarten and first grade classroom, or a fourth and fifth grade class.
References


Million, J. (1996, February). To loop or not to loop? This a question for many schools. *NAESP Communicator, 18*(6).


