

DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH ON THE
PRIMARY LOOPING PROGRAM
AT TRI-COUNTY NORTH
ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

Master's Thesis

Submitted to

The School of Education and Allied Professions
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree
Master of Education

by

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August 1999

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ABSTRACT

DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH ON THE PRIMARY LOOPING PROGRAM AT TRI-COUNTY NORTH ELEMENTARY

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University of Dayton, 1999

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As the educational process continues to be a constant challenge, schools continue to look for ways to improve student learning. Experts agree that within the realm of learning, the quality of relationships established and the quality of the learning environment provided have a direct impact on student achievement. The relationships include those developed between the teacher and student, the teacher and parent, and the student to his or her classmates. It is within these relationships that students learn to identify either positive or negative attitudes toward their experiences in school.

A variety of techniques are used to establish classroom environments that facilitate learning. Among them, an emphasis is placed on providing a sense of security and belonging for students in school. One program becoming increasingly popular amongst parents, students, and teachers is "looping." In this program, teachers move up to the next grade level with their students, thereby having at least two years to work with them. Part of its popularity stems from the fact that it provides extra time to develop and maintain meaningful relationships.

With looping, teachers have the opportunity to provide continuity in learning, and they have more time to meet individual student needs. In turn,

students feel cared about, are more motivated to learn, and are more positive about school.

This study was conducted to describe the effectiveness of looping on providing classroom environments conducive to learning and on the establishment of positive relationships as perceived by students, parents, teachers, and community members. The instruments used in this descriptive study include a parent questionnaire, interviews, and discussions.

Responses indicated an overall satisfaction with looping. Parents felt that their children enjoyed being with the same teacher and classmates for two years. They also indicated that their children had positive attitudes toward school and were working diligently to achieve success. Students were very optimistic about the program. Teachers were excited about the opportunity to provide continuity within the curriculum, to have the time necessary to really know students, and to make a difference in their social, emotional, and academic lives.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Factors determining what children learn, how they learn, and how much they learn include their physical well being and the emotional and cognitive relationships they have with those who care for them (Katz, 1991). Children usually need adult support to find the means and the confidence to bring forth their ideas and offer them, day after day, to teachers, parents, and friends (Edwards & Springate, 1995). Thus, teachers help ensure student success by establishing positive relationships with students. Teachers even facilitate learning more effectively by understanding the student's learning style, academic strengths, needs, and personality traits (Lincoln, 1997). Two important aspects of teaching, then, are creating a positive learning environment and establishing quality relationships.

There is often not enough time in the academic year to develop meaningful relationships with all children, especially with those who come with a variety of psychological, social, and physical needs taking precedence over educational system needs. "Today we have nonstandardized children- children of poverty, children who don't speak English as their native language, children with severe physical and mental disabilities, children who were born with low birth weights, and children whose parents have split up, if they were ever together at all" (Grant, 1997, p. 90). For so many children, it is difficult to feel comfortable and to trust new adults without knowing them over an extended period of time. Yet, it remains essential for teachers to be responsive to the

wide range of developmental levels, backgrounds, experiences, and needs children bring to school (Katz, 1991).

According to Jim Grant (1997), founder and executive director of The Society For Developmental Education, one problem with American schools is that instead of assessing developmental preparedness, the criteria for Kindergarten entrance is based on chronological age. Moreover, when the system insists that every child has 36 weeks to master all the material in a specific grade level, many schools resort to social promotion; whereby a child is moved on to the next grade because the date of birth indicates that the child should not be retained (Grant, 1997). Children soon become frustrated with the curriculum at the next grade level and develop poor attitudes toward school.

Grant writes that this may also be the result of placing children in the wrong grade to begin with, and that most research estimates about 20 percent of school children are in the wrong grade. Moreover, large numbers of students diagnosed with attention deficit disorder or learning disabilities are younger than their grade level peers and have simply been placed in the wrong grade. These same young children are generally those who end up dropping out, being referred to special education, or being retained. Retention is one extra time option that teachers consider for at risk students, but it clearly should not be the only option and is often not the best option (Grant, 1997).

Some claim that the answer lies in developmentally appropriate practice. In fact, the position of the National Association for the Education of Young Children is, "Whether schools achieve the potential for students to become life long learners is largely dependent on the degree to which teachers adopt principles of developmentally appropriate practice" (National Association for

the Development of Young Children, 1986, p. 21). According to Wood (1997), children's developmental needs should be the foundation for every choice made in classrooms and schools, and these needs should remain at the center of decisions about school organization, policies, scheduling, and everyday practices. Suggestions for meeting students' needs include reducing and maintaining small class size, encouraging parent volunteers, providing counseling and tutoring services, offering summer school, implementing all day kindergarten, and promoting systems whereby students stay with the same teacher for more than one year (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Perhaps more importantly, teachers need to familiarize themselves with the ages and stages of childhood development and use that information to match instruction to children's individual needs.

Many parents and politicians are demanding stricter standards and measurements of progress at the same time that many young children are feeling the effects of the disintegration of families and communities. Although children need unhurried time to explore and do their best work (Edwards & Springate, 1995), many are rushed through their day from home to school, from school to day care, to after school activities and somehow manage to slip into their parent's work schedule along the way. This lack of continuity means that for some, the five and one half hours spent at school are the most stable part of their day. Therefore, it is imperative that schools research ways to provide additional security, an increased sense of safety, and more stability for children whose lives are laden with change, or who lack meaningful parental relationships (Jankoski, 1996).

Providing extra time options and an increased sense of stability for children, especially for those who are developmentally too young to succeed in a particular grade or program, are great reasons to consider looping (Grant, 1994). Looping, commonly referred to as progressive or multi year teaching, focuses on the continuity of relationship and the learning environment (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). By allowing children to stay with the same caring teacher for at least a two year time period, schools can provide the stable foundation that many children need.

With the looping experience, “teachers have a longer time frame with the students during which they can relate, interrelate, and integrate the curriculum to fit the needs of the individual student and group needs” (Lincoln, 1997, p. 50). Extra time is gained at the beginning of the second year because students do not need an adjustment period before instruction begins (Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996). With time on their side teachers can:

- better understand the learning styles and needs of their students.
- offer students a stable and predictable environment.
- approach the curriculum in more depth because of the extra time for children to make connections in their learning.
- gain more knowledge about the grade level requirements through which students must pass.
- establish an understanding of parents’ needs and expectations regarding their child’s education. (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996).

Even more time can be gained through what Char Forsten calls the “Summer Bridge.” A teacher can provide meaningful projects, correspondence, and reading activities that help to stay connected with students and to make new

connections with them over the summer (Forsten, 1996). This minimizes losing progress prior to the upcoming school year and gives students the advantage of seeing education as a life-long learning process.

Purpose of Study

School programs are more effective when supported by the community and when those involved substantiate the benefits. This study was conducted to describe the attitudes of parents, students, teachers, board members, and the Parent Teacher Organization toward looping as a means to providing positive learning environments and additional instruction time.

Problem Statement

Having extra learning time is important for both teachers and students, but it is highly uncommon in schools. This is particularly true today when the curriculum has been pushed down by our American “faster is better” culture to the point that what is often found in today’s kindergarten was found in late first or early second grade just three decades ago (Uphoff, 1994). Moreover, a traditional school year includes an initial period of four to six weeks whereby teachers and students spend most of their time getting to know each other. During this period, teachers also need to go over classroom rules and procedures, review previous skills, and help children to establish working relationships. Thus, for students to master the skills necessary, it is increasingly more important to look at ways for students and teachers to gain more time for instruction.

Success depends, too, on the teachers’ ability to create classroom environments that foster student learning by providing opportunities for positive

experiences with the curriculum and with relationships. In order to give children the best education, teachers and parents need to work together to assist each child in developing a foundation for a life time of learning (Uphoff, 1994).

Research Questions

In order to determine the effectiveness of looping on establishing positive relationships and classroom environments that foster quality student learning as perceived by students, parents, and teachers, the following questions were addressed:

1. Do students in the second year of the looping process have a positive attitude toward school?
2. Do parents in the second year of the looping process perceive this program to be a positive experience?
3. Do staff members in the second year of the looping process perceive looping as a positive experience?

Assumptions

It is assumed that subjects completing surveys and participating in interviews will be open and honest in giving feedback after evaluating their two year experience.

Limitations

The results of this study are limited to three groups of students at Tri - County North Elementary, a small rural school in Lewisburg, Ohio.

- Class A was a group of second graders completing a first to second grade loop.
- Class B was a group of third graders completing a second to third grade loop.
- Class C was a group of third graders completing a second to third grade loop. However, this group had a substitute teacher from August to December of second grade and then had another substitute teacher from March until June of third grade.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of clarity:

At risk: Limited by social, emotional, or academic situations leading to the possibility of school failure.

Benchmark Skills: Academic behaviors that students must exhibit at specified times throughout the educational experience.

Bonding: The formation of a close personal relationship through frequent or constant association (Jankoski, 1996).

Caring: Regard for another person (Jankoski, 1996).

Classroom relationships: Interaction between students and their peers, students and the teacher, and even the parent and the teacher (Jankoski, 1996).

Continuity in Learning: Progressive and ongoing learning from one year to the next.

Curriculum: Grade level academic requirements through which students must pass.

Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Academic activities that enable children to find success and positive experiences (Uphoff, 1994).

Learning Environment: Setting, conditions, surroundings, and ambience in which learning takes place.

Looping: A classroom program, sometimes called multi year teaching, where students have the same teacher for two or more successive years.

Multi year classroom: A class that has the same teacher for more than one year.

Security: A feeling of safety and assurance.

Self esteem: Confidence and satisfaction in oneself (Jankoski, 1996).

Stability: A sense of balance, serenity, or harmony.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Research on Looping

According to Wood (1997), the most important variable in a positive elementary school program is the constant attention of a single teacher or care giver with whom the child can develop a predictable and meaningful relationship. Furthermore, he states that it is extremely important for teachers to have the opportunity to stay with the same group of children for two years in a row. In fact, having the same routine and consistency from one grade to the next provides many benefits for children (Grant, 1997). Research consistently suggests that long term teacher and student relationships improve student performance as well a job satisfaction for teachers (Burke, 1996).

One way to establish long term teacher and student relationships is through looping, an extra time option that has become an area of interest and research for schools (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). Looping was initially promoted by early twentieth century educator, Rudolph Steiner in Europe (MAGnet Newsletter, 1995). In fact, Germany has reported success with teachers and students staying together for as many as six years. Looping has also been successful in the United States since the 1970s with two-to-three year assignments for students and teachers. Experienced educators claim that looping helps meet the needs of the changing American families by providing stability and continuity within a framework of social learning.

Looping begins when one teacher moves up one grade with the students. Continuing a cycle of looping requires a partnership of two teachers who teach successive grade levels in alternate years. According to Grant, this involves a philosophical change, but not a major school restructuring in terms of the building or space. In fact, most teachers don't need a great deal of retraining to begin looping (Grant, Johnson, & Forsten, 1997). Teachers simply need the desire, the support of parents and administration, and the time to plan a two year curriculum. In this way looping "allows teachers and administrators to move into a change that produces a minimum of fear, anxiety, and frustration, not only for children, but for parents and themselves" (Grant, Johnson, & Forsten, 1997, p. 23).

Today, reports from teachers and students throughout the United States are appearing more often claiming both academic and social benefits from multi year assignments. Social benefits include:

- less anxiety about the upcoming school year and the new teacher after the first year (Hanson, 1995).
- classmates display increased levels of trust, commitment, and support and even the shy children gain confidence within the stable and predictable environment (Grant, 1995).
- a sense of community and family among students, parents, and teachers (Checkley, 1995).
- providing a stabilizing force in children's lives (Wood, 1997).

Among the academic benefits are:

- a gain of almost a month of instructional time because getting acquainted time is eliminated and less review is necessary (Hanson, 1995).

- 70% stated that looping allowed them to use more positive approaches to classroom management.
- 92% stated that they knew more about their students.
- 69% found students were more willing to volunteer in class.
- 85% felt that students were able to see themselves as important members of a group and in school as a whole.
- 84% developed more positive relationships with parents.

One group of teachers who taught the same students for three years said that the experience was the most satisfying interval of their professional lives because it allowed them to see students grow and change over time. A group of fourth grade teachers in their second looping assignment reported an incredible difference in how much the children learn because time isn't lost getting to know each other at the beginning of the year (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). Instead, instruction begins right away through building on experiences from the previous year as if the second year begins on the 181st day of school. These teachers also agreed that new children seemed to fit right in to what resembles a large family (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996).

In discussing staying together for three years, students from the Delta Project at Elbert County School System, repeatedly stated how much they liked it (Mizzelle, Hart, & Pate, 1993). This project involved four teachers and approximately one hundred students working together through their middle school years. Students felt that they knew each other better, they understood what was expected of them, they had more self confidence, and they believed that the teachers understood them, cared about them, and were willing to take time to work with them (Mizzelle, Hart, & Pate, 1993). In general, students' self

esteem and attitudes toward school improved during the two years of study.

Another benefit to students and teachers is the way in which looping enhances positive relationships between teachers and parents. Parents are more content and supportive with the educational process when they feel they know the teacher and trust her "style" with the children. Of course, the longer parents have to work with the teacher, the more trust develops. Parents even report feeling more comfortable with conferences as stronger parent to teacher relationships are established (Burke, 1996). They are particularly secure when they know their child likes school, and they see their child making progress and finding success.

By the end of the second year, there is usually an increase in parent involvement, and the more involved parents are, the more likely children are to grow academically (Grant, 1995). Parent support has been described by looping teachers as "fantastic" in terms of volunteering time. Teachers stated that getting to know the families helped make even a large school seem more like a neighborhood school (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). In fact, communication with parents can be particularly rewarding as even "standoffish" parents begin to participate the second year (Grant, Johnson, & Forsten, 1997).

One School's Experience With Looping

A second grade teacher from Brookville Elementary School in Brookville, Ohio said she looks forward to continuing looping in the future (personal communication, 1997). For her, the greatest aspect was having enough time to actually finish the reading series. She contributed that success to not losing the first month of school the second year. She admitted that teaching both first and

important for parents to understand that just because their child is in a looping program, their child will not be automatically “gifted” or extremely ahead of other children in the same grade. On the up side, looping gave her the option to withhold from making decisions about retention after one year. She said that having the extra time provided by looping is often just enough to get some children within the realm of proficiency academically. Also, she stated that it was easier to meet student needs the second year because she had increased time to observe them and to come up with creative intervention ideas.

Fourth grade students from Brookville Elementary School felt “lucky” to have had their teacher for two years (personal communication, 1997). They said that their teacher made learning fun, and she would do whatever it took to make sure they understood what she was teaching. Students talked about working cooperatively on projects, having centers to work independently with, and even doing research on the computers as activities that made them enjoy coming to school. They said that they felt like a family and that they learned to appreciate their differences and accept each other’s faults. “Our teacher taught us to work out our problems with kids in here,” reported one boy.

The class described how their teacher would hold meetings where they would sit in a circle and share any problems they were having. “She made us come up with solutions and talk about how we could do things differently next time,” claimed one girl. “Yeah, we knew we had to because we were going to be together for two years,” said another boy. The class agreed that looping would not be a good idea if students did not like their teacher. Perhaps more importantly, as one girl said, “We know that she likes us, so we really want to make her happy too.”

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The research design was a descriptive study using questionnaires and interviews to determine the levels of satisfaction with the looping program. Students, teachers, principals, parents, and school board members were asked to participate in the study and report their reactions to multi year classrooms.

Subjects

Sixty-five students from two grade levels and three classrooms in the second year of looping were part of the accessible population. The population described here reflects each classroom in its entirety. The population included 11 boys and 10 girls from the second grade class, 10 boys and 12 girls from one of the third grade classrooms, and 11 boys and 11 girls from the other third grade classroom. Table 1 provides the the breakdown of the population by race, socioeconomic standing, and single parent homes. Statistical data represents the number and percentage of students in each classification.

Table 1

Student Demographic Data by Grade Level and Classroom

	Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 3	
	N	P	N	P	N	P
African American	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%
Caucasian	20	95%	22	100%	22	100%
Free / Reduced Lunch	5	24%	4	18%	4	18%
Single Parent Home	8	38%	5	23%	4	18%

N = Number of Students

P = Percentage of Students

Setting

School. During the 1998-1999 school year, Tri-County North Elementary School had an enrollment of 444 students. Of this total enrollment, 67 were Kindergarten, 109 were First Grade, 89 were Second Grade, 95 were Third Grade, and 84 were Fourth Grade students.

It is important to note that this school is making ongoing changes to improve student performance. One year ago, a consultant was hired to help teachers and administrators establish benchmark skills in reading for each grade level. Teachers agreed that maintaining high expectations for all students was important and after many sessions throughout the school year, grade level benchmarks were established. It was also agreed that parents, being key components of student success, needed to be aware of these benchmark skills. A school brochure was designed and will be given to parents in the Fall of 1999 with a full description of its content and value.

Community. The community is primarily a low to middle income residential and agricultural community with a population of approximately 1,600 people. There were 1,224 students enrolled in this school system for the 1998-1999 school year.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting Instrument. Parents were asked to respond to a two page Parent Questionnaire constructed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The first page presented twelve statements with agree, disagree,

or unsure responses. Six statements concerned the parent's perceptions of the child's emotional responses to looping. Two statements addressed the parent's relationship with the teacher. Two statements were geared toward the parent's understanding of school curriculum. Finally, the last two statements addressed whether or not parent's would choose looping again or recommend the program to others.

The second page listed five open ended questions requesting parents' written statements and opinions. These questions addressed academic, social, and emotional benefits as well as any advantages or disadvantages as a result of looping. Parents were also asked to describe how their child's attitude toward school was affected from the looping program. Statements and questions addressing similar topics were grouped together.

The researcher referred to a variety of resources concerning validity issues before creating a parent questionnaire. The questionnaire was intended to be as brief as possible while maintaining a thorough overview of the looping program. Questions with a potential for embarrassment or resentment were avoided. The researcher was careful to choose statements without biased or misleading phrases. The researcher also tried to obtain more openness and honesty from parents by allowing questionnaires to be submitted anonymously. Then, the researcher asked two colleagues and her principal to check the items for content validity.

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument. Parent questionnaires were distributed to obtain a percentage rating of parents who felt looping provided a positive experience in an environment that supported their child's social and educational needs.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of the Results

Page one of the twelve item questionnaire given to parents was tallied, computed with percentages of agreement, and recorded as Respondent Frequency by Percentage and by Number in Appendix B. The second section of parents' written responses was reviewed, condensed, and summarized noting similarities. Results from interviews and discussions are included below from students, parents, teachers, administrators, the Parent Teacher Organization, and school board members.

Discussion of the Results

Do students in the second year of looping perceive it to be a positive experience? Third grade students from Tri-County North stated that Teacher A helped to make school a great place to be. "She's the nicest teacher I've ever had," said one little girl. "Well, she's pretty, smart, and funny too," added a boy from her class. "I like looping because we had Teacher A and she gives a lot of hugs. She helped me learn to read! But mostly, I have a lot of friends now and we learned a lot this year," continued another girl. "Well, I never liked school until second grade. But, my teacher makes learning easy and she makes me feel smarter than I used to be. I was really glad to be with her two years, but there are teachers I definitely wouldn't want to be with that long," said another boy. The class agreed that it was nice to know who their teacher was over the summer in between, too, because they weren't nervous coming back to school.

In fact, most children agreed, “We couldn’t wait for school to start!”

The third grade class of Teacher B seemed just as eager to report their love for their teacher and for school. “She made me want to be a teacher when I grow up,” one girl replied. “We got to do a lot of cool projects like when we made the ocean bubble to read in!” said a boy with excitement. “Well, um, I liked the party we had last summer. Our whole class went to the park and played games and ate and stuff like that,” added another boy. “Yeah, we even get to sing in her wedding now!” another girl said. Most of the children agreed that it was nice to have each other for two years and that they have a lot of close relationships as a result. Students also felt very prepared for the fourth grade and gave Teacher B all the credit for making them feel smart. “She took time with me and even gave me extra help. I don’t feel so behind now, and I think its because she really liked me a lot,” stated another boy.

Second grade students focused on a love for Teacher C as well. They shared feelings of closeness to her as if they had known her a very long time. “You can be yourself in this class,” said one girl. “Yeah, and we don’t laugh at each other when we goof up because we are all good at something,” added another girl. “I like the way we work on projects together, like on the computer and stuff,” stated one boy. “We do a lot of fun stuff in here and we have the best teacher!” continued another boy. The children agreed that being together for two years made learning fun because they were able to see how much each other progressed academically. Students felt that they had to be good at school because the teacher really knew them and she knew their parents too. “Besides,” said one boy, “we have the smartest class in second grade!”

Do parents consider looping to be a positive experience? Specific areas included: student and teacher relationships, parent to teacher relationships, and students' social, emotional, and academic growth. In reviewing the responses from the first page of the parent survey, 91% of parents agreed that looping was an overall positive experience for their child. In fact, two of the three classes showed 100% agreement. Moreover, 100% agreed in all three classes that their child enjoyed being with the same teacher for two years. Results for parent to teacher relationships showed that 92% of parents felt more comfortable communicating with the teacher the second year. The strongest agreement was in the second grade which showed 100% agreement. In the area of student social and emotional growth, 92% of parents agreed that their child enjoyed having the same classmates. Although, some parents wondered whether their child missed out on establishing new friendships and exposure to new styles of teaching and if this might have kept children behind others from growing socially or emotionally.

The surveys revealed that 85% of parents felt that the summer in between the two years was less stressful for their child. Children seemed to show less anxiety about the upcoming year because they already knew the teacher and knew what children would be in their class. 97% of parents agreed that it was also less stressful for their child to actually begin the second year. This corresponds highly with the fact that 95% stated their child understood what was expected of him or her at the beginning of the school year. As far as the second year being less stressful for parents, 89% were in agreement. Once again, the strongest agreement was in the second grade where 94% shared this feeling.

began participating more in class because of feeling the acceptance from other classmates. Parents wrote that the classes seemed to be closer and that true camaraderie was exhibited in most cases.

In terms of academics, parents reported that their child had the benefit of truly being known and understood by the teacher. As one parent wrote, "With the teacher knowing my daughter's weaknesses and strengths, the teacher knows when she can do better, the teacher communicates with me the parent, and we work together to get my daughter doing her potential." Another parent wrote, "My son has excelled beautifully both years because his teacher knew him as a person." Parents also appreciated the way in which looping gave teachers the time to know when students needed a little extra help or a "pat on the back." Many parents commented on the benefit of having more instruction time because the class was able to begin academics right away the second year instead of spending time on formalities like discipline procedures, rules, and classroom routines.

Some of the parents felt that looping might be a disadvantage in terms of social growth. Although they believed friendships were strong in the looping class, they wondered if it was a good idea to have kept their child from being with friends they had made in kindergarten and first grades. Others questioned whether or not it kept children from establishing new friendships. Some felt that being exposed to different children might have been better for their child, especially in cases where children had problems with classmates.

Most parents, however, agreed that looping provided very positive results for their child socially. One parent wrote, "My child has learned to love all the children in his class for who they are. They have created strong friendships and

have spent much time working together.” Many parents were impressed by the way that children seemed to appreciate each other, work well together, and accept each other’s differences. Some felt that the children were like a family, including sibling rivalry. Parents that had spent time in the classrooms commented on how the children were able to laugh, cry, and study together all in one day. They enjoyed watching children encourage each other and praise one another for successes. As one parent wrote, “The atmosphere was always warm, friendly, cheerful, and supportive, what a wonderful place to be.”

When asked to comment on possible disadvantages, the majority of parents wrote “none.” As mentioned previously, there were some concerns about possible missed opportunities for establishing new friendships. The largest concern from parents, though, was whether or not their child was ready for the next grade and how their child would react to having a new teacher. One parent, an active member of the Parent Teacher Organization, wrote “ I haven’t experienced any disadvantages, but I will be anxious to see what happens in fourth grade. The disadvantages, if any, might show up there. Was it too easy for them in 2nd and 3rd? Did they do enough? Can they adjust well to a new teacher?” When interviewed, this parent restated her support of the program and insisted that her children had both done well so far, but she remains skeptical about the transition to fourth grade.

Do staff members perceive looping to be a positive experience? Staff members included teachers, administrators, and school board members. Personal and telephone interviews and discussions were held between the researcher and these individuals.

actually spent less time in the classroom because of their confidence in the teachers and in their child's education.

Teacher A found her looping experience to be so "ideal" that she is ready to loop every year. She stated that while the first year was difficult with learning a new curriculum and working with younger children, the extra effort was worth it because the second year was so terrific. She commented on the importance of a looping teacher to work well with other teachers because of being involved with two grade level teams. She found it interesting, too, to see the overlap and continuity within which the two curriculums could be approached, and she enjoyed the academic freedom she received to approach them over a two year time period. In this way, her students had the academic benefit of more time on task and more continuity of skills introduced.

Teacher B felt that her class realized many benefits as well. She, too, viewed looping as an exciting way to have enough time to really reach children and make a difference in their lives. She enjoyed watching the progress her students made socially, emotionally, and academically over the two year time period. However, her experience was different in that she was on maternity leave for the first half of the second grade year and the last three months of the third grade year. This teacher did visit the classroom often and the children felt close to her and to both of her new babies. She agrees that this took away the benefit of having a single primary teacher, but states that the students' bonding over the two years gave them the advantages socially that allowed for more security and self confidence. They relied on each other and have formed very close friendships.

Both the principal and superintendent expressed definite satisfaction with the looping program. They felt that they had very strong teachers implementing the program and that they would like to continue it. "I've heard only positive comments about looping here," stated the principal. She feels that the community supports the program and that parents have been highly satisfied with the results. She felt that the stability and continuity that looping provides children is important to their self confidence. The superintendent felt that perhaps the social and emotional benefits derived were the most impressive aspects of looping. However, he stated that with enough data, teachers could show increased academic benefits as well. Documentation is critical he said. He has also considered expanding looping into the Middle School.

Although the principal and superintendent are in favor of looping, they are in agreement that not all teachers in the building should loop. First of all, it is important to provide alternative programs for parents. Secondly, a teacher should not be forced to loop. Teachers that loop should do so because they have the desire and have knowledge about the program. Still, it remains important that an agreement between the teacher, the parents, and the administration is made in all cases. For the upcoming year, a new cycle has begun with a first grade teacher moving up to second with her class and a second grade teacher coming down to receive a first grade class.

One board member said that he felt looping was a success. He had attended the Parent Teacher Organization meeting where this researcher gave a presentation to the community about looping. After listening to the definition of looping, the benefits it provides, the possible down sides and how they were corrected, and the results obtained from the parent and student surveys, he was

“very impressed.” He really enjoyed the video tape of student interviews in the classroom and felt that Tri-County North could use more opportunities for the program. He agreed that the success ultimately depended on the teacher, her capabilities, and the support she receives from parents. He went on to say that the parents he had spoken to after the meeting seemed very positive and that there was an overall acceptance felt among the community members that attended. He was pleased to see the emphasis being placed on the benefit of student learning and was curious about whether or not other teachers were requesting to loop with their classrooms.

Members of the PTO were extremely thankful for the community awareness presentation and seemed thrilled with the results. As parents, most said they hoped to have the same opportunity for their own children. A few remained skeptical and felt that it was still important for children to be exposed to a variety of teachers and teaching styles. They wondered how children would ever say good bye to a good teacher they had been with for two years. They also remained concerned about the possibility of a difficult classroom staying together that long.

However, they did admit that many children could benefit from the program and agreed that it was a good idea to have the option in our school. For them, the best way to implement looping was for the teacher to have the initial desire, gain approval from the administration, and present the invitation to the parents of the students in the classroom. Most agreed that the best way would be to wait until mid year of the first year to make the decision. In this way, teachers would know who was in the class and how the class functioned together before planning to keep them together for two years. These parents

particularly liked the idea that the entire program was dependent on parent approval. In conclusion, they felt it was important to continue evaluating the looping program and monitoring its effectiveness.

Researcher's Perspective. Being the second grade teacher, this researcher found that students' academic achievement was enhanced considerably through working with them over a two year period. Not to say that they excelled over children in other classroom settings, but each grew at significant rates from the beginning of first grade through the end of second grade. It made a big difference the second year when children came back after summer break with journals they had kept, books they had read, worksheets they had completed, math facts they had mastered, and most of all, the excitement to share with everyone. Learning had not stopped the last day of first grade. Instead, children left school with a "Project Packet" filled with fun ways to learn all summer and they returned with completed activities. They couldn't wait to share what they had accomplished. Of course, this researcher wrote each student a letter in July to keep communication open. Over half of the students wrote a letter in return. This made an excellent writing sample for their portfolios.

It also helped significantly when time was not spent the first month of school getting to know each other. It was great to see them fly through the door saying, "I'm BACK!" and looking around the room saying, "Wow, look at all of OUR new stuff!" It was as if the class had an extended weekend. Students reminded themselves of the rules and procedures and then asked what they could "earn" this year for being good. The helpful part was already knowing each student's abilities and what they had been exposed to the previous year.

In terms of receiving new students, the class welcomed them warmly and helped them to fit right in. This class had three new students over the two years spent together and all three adjusted quickly and were accepted. In fact, students found it refreshing to see a new face and learn about a new person. Usually, a veteran student would sit by the new student and help out whenever possible by describing expectations and procedures.

Toward the end of the looping cycle, this researcher found it important to focus on helping students make a positive transition to their new environment. Ideas that proved to be successful included inviting teachers to read to the looping class and answer questions about the next grade level, doing projects with the teachers and students at the next grade level, visiting classrooms at the next grade level, and even establishing once a week Reading Buddies with upper grade classrooms. It helped to allow students to share their anxiety and to reassure them through open discussion that they were fully prepared to meet the demands of the next grade level. It helped to talk about the fun and exciting aspects of the next grade level. Above all, however, it helped to remind them that they were always welcome to stop by and receive a hug.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Across the country today people are talking about the social and emotional needs of children. In a country where families are constantly on the run and children lead busy and transient lifestyles, people are beginning to put emphasis on programs that offer children more stability. Experts have focused on the importance of developmentally appropriate education and the increased need for children to have more time to master the curriculum. It has become increasingly important, also, for teachers to provide environments conducive to learning.

Looping is one program addressing these issues. Teachers stay together with their students for two or more years which enables them to provide a stable environment and a continuous curriculum. However, success depends upon the approval and satisfaction of its participants. This research has described the effects of looping on relationships and learning as perceived by students, parents, teachers, school board members, and the Parent Teacher Organization.

The data collecting instruments used were a parent questionnaire, interviews and discussions with students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and members of the Parent Teacher Organization. These instruments provided the opportunity to evaluate and express opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of the looping program.

The results were overwhelmingly positive. Parents reported that looping offered their child the opportunity to build up their self confidence and to maintain supportive friendships. They commented that their children loved school, many for the first time in their educational experience, and that they loved their teacher. Many parents agreed that their child seemed eager to please the teacher and worked extra hard on his or her assignments.

Parents also reported improved academic achievement for their child. The majority agreed that looping allowed the teacher to get to know the students better and to meet their needs academically. Most parents felt confident that their child was receiving an excellent education with social, emotional and academic benefits as a result of participating in the program. Truly valued was the relationship parents felt with the teacher. Many believed that the positive connection between parents and school encouraged greater academic achievement for their child.

The majority of parents responded that they would choose looping again for their child and recommend it to other parents. However, they repeatedly commented that it would depend on the teacher because not all teachers would achieve the same results. Parents appreciated the fact that looping would only occur with parent approval.

Administration has also been pleased with the results from the looping program. They agree that it provides valuable social and emotional benefits for children as well as the opportunity for teachers to take advantage of continuity in the curriculum. Based on these reactions, the majority of school board members view looping favorably as well. However, it is agreed that looping should remain only one of the options for teaching at Tri-County North and that

The majority of parents involved in the looping program perceive it to be a positive experience. In fact, 89% agreed that they would choose looping again if given the opportunity, and 88% indicated they would recommend the program to other parents. Overall, parents view looping as an opportunity for teachers to really get to know the children and, therefore, provide a more quality education to fit student needs. The major concern was the ease through which students would adapt the following year in a new environment.

Teachers in the second year of looping are extremely enthusiastic about the program. For teachers, looping provides extra time to work with children. It allows them to work more creatively with the curriculum and to experience continuous progress with students. Classroom procedures run smoothly the second year and discipline problems are minimal. Relationships with parents become closer and more supportive, which in turn reinforces the students' education. Teachers realize their responsibility to help with the transition when it comes time for students to receive a new teacher and classmates.

Teachers involved in looping at Tri-County North Elementary School were successful in providing extra time for quality instruction as well as establishing classroom environments that fostered student learning.

Recommendations

Schools and teachers considering the implementation of looping should contact neighboring schools that have it already in place. Visiting looping classrooms and interviewing the teachers and students is an excellent way to begin preparing for the experience. It is also helpful to ask for copies of the letters they have written to parents about the looping program. Teachers and

administrators should also attend workshops that deal with the concept of looping, especially those offered by Dr. Jim Grant, founder and Director of the Society of Developmental Education. Purchasing The Looping Handbook and 72 Answers to Your Most Pressing Questions from Crystal Springs Books is an excellent idea for resources as well.

Once the administration is prepared and has approved partnerships between teachers in successive grade levels, it is time to plan a parent meeting. Letters should be sent home inviting parents to the meeting with a brief description of looping and its benefits. At the meeting, teachers should be ready to describe their genuine interest in the students, the benefits available from the program, the way all of its potential problems are correctable, and to answer parent questions. It is important to have administration present at the meeting to show their support.

Afterward, send placement letters home for all parents to complete with the choice of having their child placed in the same class for the following year or having their child placed with a different teacher. Finally, send home ideas for fun learning activities over the summer to all students who will be returning.

In terms of documentation, it is helpful to keep portfolios or examples of students' work throughout both years. In this way, progress and growth is identifiable and can be accurately measured and reported. This will also help the teacher and the parents monitor the effectiveness of the program on student achievement.

Teachers need to evaluate their program and be flexible enough to make the necessary changes for improvement in any areas indicated through the evaluation. Teachers should also be prepared to continue their professional

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May 21, 1999

Dear Parents,

Attached you will find a survey about looping for you to complete and return to Room 116 by Friday May 28, 1999. I am very interested in finding out :

- if looping has been a positive experience for you and your child.
- if the second year was less stressful for you and your child.
- if your child enjoyed having the same teacher and classmates.
- if you would recommend looping to other parents.

Please read over the survey carefully and circle your response to each statement on the first page. Then, please take the time to write your personal responses to the questions on the second page.

Your input is valuable as we evaluate the effectiveness of the looping program at Tri-County North. I truly appreciate your time and courtesy in completing this survey. Thank you so much.

Sincerely Yours,

Mrs. H. Derringer
Second Grade Teacher

PARENTAL SURVEY

Please circle A for Agree, D for Disagree, or U for Unsure in response to the following statements about the looping program.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| This has been a positive experience for my child. | A | D | U |
| The summer in between the two years was less stressful for my child. | A | D | U |
| My child enjoyed being with the same teacher for two years. | A | D | U |
| My child enjoyed having the same classmates for two years. | A | D | U |
| Starting the second year was less stressful for my child. | A | D | U |
| The second year was less stressful for me as a parent. | A | D | U |
| I felt more comfortable communicating with my child's teacher the second year. | A | D | U |
| I had a better understanding of my child's education after two years with the same teacher. | A | D | U |
| The teacher better understood my child's strengths and needs the second year. | A | D | U |
| At the beginning of the second year, my child understood what was expected of him / her. | A | D | U |
| If I had to do it over, I would choose looping for my child. | A | D | U |
| I would recommend looping to other parents. | A | D | U |

Comments:

Your opinions are very important. Please answer the following questions openly and honestly. Include additional pages if necessary.

1. How has your child benefited from having the same teacher for first and second grade?
2. How has this program benefited your child academically?
3. How has this program benefited your child socially?
4. What disadvantages have you experienced?
5. How has this program affected your child's attitude toward school?

PARENTAL SURVEY

Please circle A for Agree, D for Disagree, or U for Unsure in response to the following statements about the looping program.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| This has been a positive experience for my child. | A | D | U |
| The summer in between the two years was less stressful for my child. | A | D | U |
| My child enjoyed being with the same teacher for two years. | A | D | U |
| My child enjoyed having the same classmates for two years. | A | D | U |
| Starting the second year was less stressful for my child. | A | D | U |
| The second year was less stressful for me as a parent. | A | D | U |
| I felt more comfortable communicating with my child's teacher the second year. | A | D | U |
| I had a better understanding of my child's education after two years with the same teacher. | A | D | U |
| The teacher better understood my child's strengths and needs the second year. | A | D | U |
| At the beginning of the second year, my child understood what was expected of him / her. | A | D | U |
| If I had to do it over, I would choose looping for my child. | | | |

Comments:

PARENTAL SURVEY

Please circle A for Agree, D for Disagree, or U for Unsure in response to the following statements about the looping program.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| This has been a positive experience for my child. | A | D | U |
| The summer in between the two years was less stressful for my child. | A | D | U |
| My child enjoyed being with the same teacher for two years. | A | D | U |
| My child enjoyed having the same classmates for two years. | A | D | U |
| Starting the second year was less stressful for my child. | A | D | U |
| The second year was less stressful for me as a parent. | A | D | U |
| I felt more comfortable communicating with my child's teacher the second year. | A | D | U |
| I had a better understanding of my child's education after two years with the same teacher. | A | D | U |
| The teacher better understood my child's strengths and needs the second year. | A | D | U |
| At the beginning of the second year, my child understood what was expected of him / her. | A | D | U |
| If I had to do it over, I would choose looping for my child. | A | D | U |

Comments:

APPENDIX B
RESPONDENT FREQUENCY TO
PARENT SURVEY BY PERCENTAGE
AND BY NUMBER