

EXPERIENCES OF LOOPING FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

Liberty University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Laura C. Brown

November 2011

Experiences of Looping for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Phenomenological
Case Study

by Laura C. Brown

APPROVED:

COMMITTEE CHAIR

Judy Shoemaker, Ed.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Sharon Michael-Chadwell, Ed.D.

Shari Stacy, Ph.D.

CHAIR, GRADUATE STUDIES

Scott B. Watson, Ph.D.

Abstract

Laura C. Brown. EXPERIENCES OF LOOPING FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY (Under the direction of Dr. Judy P. Shoemaker) School of Education, November 2011

The problem is the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities are not being met within the general classroom. Looping, the practice of a teacher staying with the same group of students for two or more years, has been suggested as an educational approach designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The purpose of this research project was to examine the experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities from the perspectives of the looping teacher, the students with learning disabilities, and their parents. Therefore, a phenomenological case study design was utilized. The methods of data collection included teacher and student interviews, a parental questionnaire, examination of student artifacts, and observations of everyday school activities. Examination of the research data revealed no significant improvement in the academic or speech performances of the students with learning disabilities; yet, their social skills and emotional competencies improved.

Keywords: learning disabilities, looping, multi-age teaching, case study, teacher perspectives, Waldorf education, student perspectives, parent perspectives, interviews, phenomenological case study, questionnaire, third grade, fourth grade

Dedication

To my husband, Todd, who gave me the strength and encouragement I needed when the challenges seemed unbearable and I felt like giving up on this dream, I will be forever grateful. To my two miracles from God, Hagen and Landon, who granted me much patience when I needed my quiet space to work on this enormous task, may this accomplishment convince you that, “You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you” (Philippians 4:13).

To my parents, your countless prayers undergirded me during the most difficult hours. Knowing that you had lifted me up to the Father helped me to carry on. I extend many thanks to my mother and father in-laws who supported me by taking care of the boys when I needed to work on my research. To my many friends who prayed for me and encouraged me, thank you. May you all know deep within your hearts that God truly has great plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11). We simply have to embrace the tasks He sets before us and rely on Him to carry us through.

Most of all, I know that without the grace of my Savior, Jesus Christ, I could have never completed this degree. He placed this dream in my heart six years ago. Although I doubted at times I could make it, He was always faithful. May what He has allowed me to accomplish bring glory to Him and extend His kingdom.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem	2
Problem Statement	8
Purpose of the Study	8
Professional Significance of the Study	9
Guiding Questions	10
Key Terms.....	11
Summary	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Looping	13
Theoretical Framework.....	14
History of Looping.....	21
Benefits for the General Classroom.....	25
Benefits for Exceptional Students.....	37
Challenges for Exceptional Students	42
Summary and Conclusion	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	47
Research Questions.....	48
Design Appropriateness	48
Participants.....	50
The Setting	51
Procedures.....	52
Data Collection	54
Data Analysis.....	61
Tier One: Themes for Each Individual Student	67
Tier Two: Themes Among the Five Students	68
Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, Transferability	70
Summary.....	71
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	73
Introduction.....	73
Tier One	74
Tier Two.....	96
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION	100
Review of the Methodology.....	101
Summary of the Results	102
Relationship of the Current Study to Previous Research.....	112
My Reflections.....	119
Limitations	123
Implications for Practice	124

REFERENCES.....128

APPENDICES

A: Permission Letter to School Principal 141
B: Student Binder 143
C: Parent Consent for Child to Participate Form Student Who Looped from
Third Grade to Fourth Grade 145
D: Parent Participant Consent Form 147
E: Parent Looping Questionnaire 149
F: Follow-Up Letter to Parent 151
G: Teacher Participant Consent Form 153
H: Teacher Interview Form..... 155
I: Verbal Assent of Minors Form 157
J: Student Interview Form 159
K: Social Competence Checklist 161
L: Table: STAR Reading and Math Scores..... 164
M: Example: Theme Document for Each Student 166
N: Example: Themes among the Students Document 168

List of Tables

Table 4.1: STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student A..... 74

Table 4.2: STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student B..... 78

Table 4.3: STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student C..... 81

Table 4.4: STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student D..... 86

Table 4.5: STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student E..... 89

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the stipulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and the objectives of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), students with disabilities are to receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Hallahan & Kaufman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2002; 2004). Therefore, it is not uncommon to find students with learning disabilities partially or fully included in any given regular public school classroom. Because of their disability and a variety of other extraneous issues, students with learning disabilities are often academically below grade-level, socially inept, and emotionally insecure (Elliott & Capp, 2003; Forsten, Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1997; Newberg, 1995).

In order for teachers to provide students with learning disabilities a successful educational experience, they must address and overcome additional obstacles he or she would not encounter if students with learning disabilities were not present within the classroom. However, it has been suggested that when students with disabilities participate in an educational approach called looping, many of the challenges faced by the teacher, the students with disabilities, and their parents can be alleviated to some degree (Bafile, 2003; Elliott & Capp, 2003; Kenney, 2007).

To illustrate how looping is utilized in an educational setting, Grant, Johnson, and Richardson (1996) stated a looped classroom occurs when a teacher moves with his or her class to the next grade for one or more years. The extra year or more with the students provides opportunities for the teacher to understand in-depth the students' individual needs. This allows the teacher to implement a variety of educational techniques to aid in the academic success of the students (Gaustad, 1998). In addition,

when children are placed within a consistent classroom environment, their sense of security can be enhanced and their social interactions with both the teacher and their classmates can be approached with greater confidence (Kenney, 2007; Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992).

While looping is a fairly novel educational technique in America, the belief that a teacher should remain with the same group of students for more than one academic year began in Germany at a Waldorf School in 1919 (Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1993). This approach has been used in various forms by a number of school systems around the world (Reynolds, Barnhart, & Martin, 1999). In recent years, the concept of looping has occurred in different formats and at all grade levels in school districts across the United States. All are attempts to provide students with a positive, developmentally appropriate education where the teacher is familiar with each student's needs, personalities, learning styles, and developmental readiness and where the students can experience a secure, supportive learning community (Grant, Johnson et al., 1996).

This chapter contains the background of the problem: the academic, social, and emotional challenges encountered by students with learning disabilities during their education experience. The problem statement and the purpose of the study, to determine if looping provides a solution to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities, is also highlighted. Additionally, the professional significance of this study, the guiding questions to be addressed, and the terms germane to this study are described.

Background of the Problem

Similar to students without learning disabilities, students with learning disabilities are moved to a different classroom and placed with a different teacher year after year.

This poses several challenges for these students, their parents, and their teachers. For example, background information and IEP goals for each student must be reviewed at the beginning of every year and communication between parents and teachers must be established (Bafile, 2003). In addition, various reports described the academic, social, and emotional challenges students with learning disabilities experience at school and how these challenges are interrelated (Bowen, 1998; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008).

Academic challenges for students with learning disabilities. Of all pupils with disabilities served within the public education system of the United States, students with learning disabilities represent the largest group. The percentage of those served from 1976-1977 to 2007-2008 rose from 1.8% to 5.2% percent (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). “Academic deficits are the hallmark of learning disabilities,” stated Hallahan and Kauffman (2006, p. 183). Students with learning disabilities experience challenges in one or more of four academic areas: (a) reading, (b) written language, (c) spoken language, and (d) math.

In regard to students who have a learning disability in reading, this particular disability is the most difficult as it involves three areas of the reading process (Hallahan, Lloyd, Kauffman, Weiss, & Martinez, 2005). Specifically, students encounter problems with decoding due to challenges with phonological and phonemic awareness. These aforementioned challenges affect the students’ ability to read fluently, which, in turn, impacts their ability to comprehend what they have read.

Students who have a written language disability face obstacles with handwriting, spelling, and composition (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Challenges in handwriting can include very slow writing and illegible work. The inability to spell correctly is a result of

their difficulty in understanding the correspondence between sounds and letters. Furthermore, students with written language disabilities have difficulties in the more creative aspects of composition. They use less complex sentence structures, include fewer types of words, write paragraphs that are less well organized, include fewer ideas in their writings, and write stories that have fewer important components, such as introducing main characters and setting scenes (Hallahan et al., 2005; Montague & Graves, 1992). Last, using correct syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics are the problems students with spoken language disabilities encounter (Hallahan et al.).

Research found learning disabilities in the area of math to be the second highest problem for students with learning disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Cawley, Parmar, Yan, and Miller (1998) found students with math learning disabilities perform several grade levels below their general education peers. These students may struggle with the computation of math facts and with word problems (Cawley et al.; Woodward & Baxter, 1997).

Social challenges in relation to academic problems for students with learning disabilities. Meeting the academic needs of students with learning disabilities is often the primary concern for school administrators and teachers, whereas their social adjustment needs are neglected (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). In fact, Ring and Travers (2005) found when students with severe learning disabilities are included in the general classroom, meeting their curriculum needs is not difficult; social inclusion is the greater challenge. Bowen (1998) stated, “While students with disabilities may have received remediation in terms of learning skills or may be functioning at or near grade level, they may not be ready emotionally or socially for regular classroom placement” (p. 17).

Not only do children with learning disabilities experience academic challenges within the general classroom, but research also revealed achievement deficits relate to social problems (Bursuck & Asher, 1986). Gresham and MacMillan (1997) stated, “In addition to deficits in the cognitive domain such as general intelligence and academic achievement, these students are at risk for repeated episodes of school failure” (p. 400). These experiences, in turn, often have unfortunate effects on the students’ self-concept, teacher-student relationships, and peer relationships. Consequently, the results of these studies suggested that the classroom environment should seek to accommodate the students with disabilities social adjustment, along with meeting their academic needs (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008).

Social challenges for students with disabilities. In contrast to their non-disabled peers, many students with learning disabilities run a greater risk of having significant social problems (Bryan, Burstein, & Ergul, 2004; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). For instance, some students with learning disabilities can have social cognition deficits as evidenced by their misinterpretation of other’s emotions and feelings and their inability to read social cues. They sometimes act as if they are oblivious to the effect their behavior has on their peers and also have difficulty understanding the perspectives of others. Consequently, they often experience rejection by their classmates. As a result, Meadon and Monda-Amaya (2008) promoted that “teachers need to be attuned to their students’ levels of social adjustment, have an awareness of how students process social information, and know what specific social skills are needed for students to develop greater levels of social competence” (p. 160).

Expanding upon the theme of social challenges for students with disabilities, William Bursuck (1989) utilized peer, teacher, and self-rating scales to examine the

social differences between elementary school students with learning disabilities and other low achieving and higher achieving children. The results indicated children with learning disabilities are less accepted, have fewer friends, have less pro-social behaviors, and are perceived by their peers and teachers as exhibiting more negative behaviors. Swanson and Malone's (1992) study revealed similar results as the authors found students with learning disabilities scored lower in peer acceptance and were more socially rejected than their non-disabled peers.

In addition, Kavale and Forness (1996) discovered 75% of 152 students with a learning disability were less socially competent than their non-learning disabled peers. In a study conducted with adolescents in contrived social situations such as role-plays, students with learning disabilities perform fewer social skills than their non-disabled peers; yet, the students interacted equally as much during informal settings, but participated less in formally scheduled or arranged social activities (Schumaker, 1992).

Conversely, in regard to the social integration of students with learning disabilities, Coben and Zigmond (1986) suggested social status problems of learning disabled students have much to do with how well they are known. These authors stated if non-learning disabled students have more opportunity to become acquainted with their learning disabled peers, the social status problems of the students with learning disabilities would improve.

Estell, Jones, Pearl, and Van Acker (2009) investigated elementary students and their best friend relationships. They discovered students with learning disabilities were as likely to have best friend relationships and to have as many best friends as their typically achieving peers. On the other hand, these students retained fewer friendships over time, and were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities.

Additionally, Gresham and MacMillan (1997) stated not only do students with mild disabilities have difficulties with peer relationships, but they also encounter challenges in relating effectively with their teachers.

In reference to language disorders, Benasich, Curtiss, and Talla (1993) learned girls diagnosed at age four with expressive language impairments are significantly more socially withdrawn at age eight when compared with other non-disabled children. Additionally, Gualtieri, Koriath, Van Bourgondien, and Saleeby (1983) stated the development of personality and a child's sense of competence in social situations are likely to rest squarely on the development of language.

Emotional challenges for students with disabilities. Bowen (1998) outlined areas of emotional weakness for students with disabilities: (a) attribution of successes on external factors, (b) low self-concept, (c) anxiety, (d) poor self-confidence, and (d) depression. Specifically, Gresham and MacMillan (1997) cited studies that discussed how students with learning disabilities had lower academic self-concepts than non-learning disabled students. Regarding their general self-concept, Chapman (1988) suggested approximately 70% of students with a learning disability experienced a lower general self-concept.

Similar to the relationship that exists between academic achievement and social competence, there also is a connection between a student's self-concept and his or her academic achievement. Bowen (1998) stressed that self-esteem contributes significantly to the relationship between test performance and anxiety and how students who demonstrate low levels of self-esteem report high test anxiety and generally obtain lower scores on general information exams.

Problem Statement

The problem is the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities are not being met within the general classroom (Bowen, 1998; Bryan et al., 2004; Cawley et al., 1998; Ring & Travers, 2005). According to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC, 2010), “The teacher understands how children learn and develop, recognizes that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences” (Standard #1). For this reason, it is the duty of the teacher to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with disabilities who are partially or fully included in the general classroom.

This phenomenological case study investigated the experiences of students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade. Incorporated into the study were the viewpoints of the students with learning disabilities, the parents of the students with learning disabilities, and the teacher who looped from third grade to fourth grade. Data collection included a variety of qualitative methodologies: (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, (c) examination of student artifacts, and (d) observations. This information provided insights into how looping affected students with learning disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to analyze the academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities who participated in a looped class. This study’s goal was to determine if looping, as an educational approach, addressed the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning

disabilities.

The site for data collection was an elementary school located within a rural district in the State of Virginia. The participants were five students with learning disabilities who looped with their class from third grade to fourth grade. The parents of the students with disabilities and their teacher were additional participants. The methods of data collection included: (a) interviews of the students with learning disabilities who looped, (b) interviews of the teacher who looped, (c) a questionnaire completed by the parents of the students with learning disabilities who looped, (d) examination of the looped students' IEPs, (e) examination of the STAR Reading and Math reports for the students with learning disabilities, and (f) observations of everyday school activities.

Professional Significance of the Study

Many recent reports on looping are written from personal experience. These anecdotal writings stated the experience of looping provides further support and instruction to aid in the academic success, social adeptness, and emotional security for students with special needs (Gaustad, 1998; Kenney, 2007; Newberg, 1995). In addition, most discoveries on looping based upon empirical research focused only upon the general classroom. The anecdotal, editorial, and experimental studies covered a variety of topics related to looping, such as the history of looping, the grade levels at which looping has been attempted, and the benefits and challenges of looping (Burke, 1996; Grant, Johnson, et al., 1996; Kenney, 2007; Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992). Educators have also researched and described the academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities within the general classroom (Bowen, 1998; Bursuck, 1989; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006).

Yet, the abovementioned studies did not connect the educational practice of

looping to the academic, social, and emotional experiences for students with learning disabilities in a qualitative context. Therefore, this phenomenological case study's goal was to assess the academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities who participated in a looped class via qualitative research.

The empirical data of this study explains the academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities who participated in a looped classroom; thus, confirming or invalidating previous reports on looping for students with learning disabilities. Consequently, the data collected from this study could find that looping is an effective strategy to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities.

Guiding Questions

The viewpoints from three groups of participants, data from student artifacts, and surveillance of everyday school activities offered common themes of how looping affected students with learning disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally. The following questions guided the research:

Guiding question 1. *How do the goals of the 2010-2011 Individual Educational Plans reveal the academic, social, and emotional experiences for students with learning disabilities who looped?*

Guiding question 2. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities, according to their parents?*

Guiding question 3. *According to the looping teacher, what are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities?*

Guiding question 4. *According to the students with learning disabilities, what are their academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping?*

Guiding question 5. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities as observed within everyday school activities?*

Guiding question 6. *What are the academic performances for students with learning disabilities who have looped as revealed in the students' STAR Reading and Math reports?*

Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the phrase *student with a disability* involves any student with a learning disability. As defined by IDEA, a *learning disability* is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (USDOE, 2004).

Academic experience refers to grades or scores received by the students in any subject area, accommodations received by the students for any subject area, the students' participation in class, and the students' study habits. The term *academic experience* also refers to the annual scores received by the students on the STAR Reading and Math assessments. *STAR* represents the Standardized Testing and Reporting assessment designed by the California Department of Education in 1997. The acronym *IEP* represents the Individual Education Plan for each student with a disability. The term *social experience* refers to skills or behaviors deemed desirable or necessary to effectively interact with others, and the term *emotional experience* entails feelings about oneself, a situation, a person, or objects that involve changes in physiological arousal and cognitions (AllPsych Online, The Virtual Psychology Classroom, n.d.).

Summary

Students with disabilities face academic, social, and emotional challenges during their educational journey (Bowen, 1998; Bursuck, 1989; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). Due to recent governmental mandates (USDOE, 2004) and the standards of InTASC (2010), general classroom teachers are responsible for meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities. Looping, where a teacher moves with his or her class to the next grade, has been recommended as an educational approach that is designed to meet the needs of these students (Gaustad, 1998; Kenney, 2007; Newberg, 1995).

The purpose of this project was to collect empirical, qualitative data by examining the academic, social, and emotional experiences of five students with learning disabilities who looped from third to fourth grade. Data was collected through qualitative methodologies: (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, (c) examination of student artifacts, and (d) observations. This research determined if looping assisted in addressing the problem of meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities.

In chapter two, various topics related to looping as discussed within current literature are highlighted. Contemporary writings include the following: (a) the basic definition of looping, (b) the alternative names for looping, (c) the theories upon which looping is based, (d) the history of looping in the United States and other countries, (e) the various academic levels at which looping has been attempted, and (f) the advantages and challenges of looping for both general classroom students and exceptional students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This phenomenological case study analyzed the experiences of students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade. The purpose of this study was to determine if looping can aid the general classroom teacher in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities. Within contemporary writings, the academic, social, and emotional challenges of students with disabilities are noted (Bowen, 1998; Bursuck, 1989; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). For looping, the majority of the empirically based research discussed the experiences of looping for students without disabilities. Few studies examined the impact of looping on exceptional students in general. Therefore, this phenomenological case study sought to fill a gap in current research by describing the experiences of students with learning disabilities who participated in a looped classroom via a thorough, qualitative analysis.

The following literature review outlines topics related to looping as discussed within current literature. This chapter begins with the basic definition of looping and the alternative terms for looping. Numerous theories promoted by a variety of educators and theorists are presented to form a theoretical framework upon which looping can be based. The history of looping in the United States and other countries, the various academic levels at which looping has been attempted, and the advantages and challenges of looping for both general classroom students and exceptional students are described.

Looping

Simply defined, looping is the practice of a teacher staying with the same group of students for two or more years (Grant, Johnson et al., 1996). Several variations are

found within the realm of education. Some institutions form heterogeneous groups in the first grade and the students remain together for the next four or eight years (Wynne & Walberg, 1994; Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). A second format of looping groups 85-90 students who are taught for a six-year period by a team of six to eight teachers (Ratzki, 1988). Another design groups students together for several years; the teachers of specialized subject areas move from class to class during the school year while the students remain in their own classroom. The students will have different teachers for each subject area, but will have the same math teacher, for example, for several years (Liu, 1997).

The most common model involves two teachers as a team: one teaches a lower grade while the other teaches the subsequent grade. The teacher of the lower grade will move with his or her class to the next grade for the following academic year while the upper grade teacher moves to begin a new class in the lower grade. This cycle repeats itself at the beginning of the next school year (Pecanic, 2003). Persistence teams, clusters, continuous learning, student-teacher progression, teacher rotation, multi-year placement, two-cycle teaching, or multi-year teaching are all additional names for looping (Brown University, 1997; Gaustad, 1998; "Multiyear Assignment," 1998).

Theoretical Framework

During the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, a number of theorists and education luminaries presented practices that promoted holistic, child-centered theories of learning and cognitive readiness upon which the educational practice of looping can be based. These include Rudolph Steiner, Jean Piaget, Dr. Jane Healy, Maria Montessori, Norman Newberg, Abraham Maslow, and certain school systems within Germany.

Rudolph Steiner. Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian-born philosopher who founded the first Waldorf School in Germany, formulated a theory of education comprised of various elements. Two of these elements, according to Uhrmacher (1995), included a pedagogy designed to meet students' developmental growth and an organization devoted to sustaining a sense of community. Steiner believed man is a threefold being of body, soul, and spirit (willing, feeling, thinking) whose capacities unfold in three developmental stages on the path to adulthood. These stages occur in seven-year increments during which the three parts of man gradually come into tandem with each other (Reinsmith, 1989).

During the first stage, infants and young children are given over to their physical surroundings; they absorb the world primarily through their senses and respond in the most active mode of knowing: imitation (Reinsmith, 1989). Those responsible for children at this stage should create an environment worthy of the child's unquestioning imitation and provide numerous opportunities for creative play (Barnes, 1991; Kenney, 2007). Steiner believed these early years lay the foundation for health or illness in later life (Reinsmith).

The second stage, which begins after children lose their primary teeth, is characterized by learning activities involving their imagination and fantasy. Steiner (as cited by Reinsmith, 1989) stated during this time children develop their inner nature. The educator's task is to transform the child's knowledge about the world into the language of the imagination using stories, parables, myths, and rhythm (Barnes, 1991; Uhrmacher, 1995). The teacher's presentation of such materials arouses the child's feelings and these feelings form the basis for the later development of the mind (Reinsmith).

The final stage involves the adolescent becoming familiar with his or her body, which leads to puberty (Kenney, 2007). The personality celebrates its independence and seeks to explore the world once again in a new way. This new curiosity is influenced by the teacher who pushes the student to step out on his or her own, to consider the laws underlying phenomena, to examine and critique his or her world, and to become aware of the world on the student's own terms. Consequently, the student develops the thinking self as these coincide with the growth of self-knowledge and the acceptance of moral accountability (Reinsmith, 1989). Upon reaching maturity at age 21, the student is ready to begin the important task of education: self-education (Barnes, 1991).

Steiner believed teachers should assume the role of the third parent and progress with their students through their primary grades; teacher-student relationships are of vital importance to the students' success in school (Ogletree, 1974). Therefore, children and teachers of the Waldorf Schools stayed together as a class from grades one through eight. This allowed the teacher to form a deep connection with each student and develop an in-depth understanding of each student's needs and interests as they progressed through the three developmental stages (Ogletree). Forming a relationship with the teacher while the teacher values the students' desires is also beneficial. The students feel safe in their surroundings while at school; consequently, creating a sense of community and optimizing their educational experience (Kenney, 2007).

Educators who follow Steiner's philosophy emphasize "the curriculum must parallel the ripening awareness of the child" and "the right thing at the right time" (Reinsmith, 1989, p. 85). Subjects are arranged in sequence, so they are compatible with the child's psychological or cognitive development (Ogletree, 1974). In addition, Steiner proposed education should avoid fragmentation of curriculum (Uhrmacher,

1995). Educators ascribing to Steiner's theory seek to improve stability within the curriculum by presenting material in blocks interspersed with extended breaks. This pattern promotes student attentiveness and allows a student to return to a subject with renewed vigor and fresh insight; consequently, the teacher is able to provide a firm foundation for introducing new material in the subsequent academic year (Uhrmacher, 1993).

Jean Piaget. Following the idea of developmental stages, Jean Piaget's theory consists of four periods of cognitive development (Bhattacharya & Han, 2001). According to Piaget, children go through a series of stages in which they demonstrate new intellectual abilities and more complex understandings of their surrounding world. Children do not skip a stage, but enter each at different times, based upon their environment and background. They grow physically, mentally, and emotionally at different times (Bhattacharya & Han). If the students are not cognitively prepared to grasp an intellectual idea, then no amount of training can alter this condition (Uhrmacher, 1993). Therefore, a teacher, who has acute knowledge of each student, can address topics when students are developmentally ready (Kenney, 2007).

Piaget also proposed the concepts of assimilation and accommodation. Piaget believed children use the knowledge gained from their experiences to help them expand their intellectual growth (Bhattacharya & Han, 2001). The link between the internal cognitive structure and external reality depends upon a child assimilating the information he or she already knows, accommodating it, or linking it to external reality or the real world. Kenney (2007) wrote, "Children use what they already know or use what they understand about their surrounding world in order to help them make sense of uncertainties." Thus, the bond created between a teacher and a student in a multi-year

classroom “assists the teacher in tapping into a student’s prior experiences to introduce new material” (p. 11).

Dr. Jane Healy. There is “a growing educational crisis of misfit between children and their schools,” stated Dr. Healy (1991, p. 1). Traditional education, which involves 90% lecture as the students sit docile, does not suit today’s children; they are raised in fast-paced lifestyles and given heavy diets of visual immediacy. She asserted meaningful learning occurs at the intersection of developmental readiness, curiosity, and significant subject matter. This idea of “readiness” refers to the brain’s functioning. There appear to be critical or at least “sensitive” periods in the course of development when certain neuron groups become particularly amenable to stimulation. Educators, parents, and all adults should be aware of such critical times and present challenging activities to engage children. This allows them to develop strong connections in life as opposed to sitting and having information fed to them (Healy, 1991; Kenney, 2007).

Maria Montessori. An Italian educator, Maria Montessori promoted a constructivist, holistic education for children (Guttek, 1995). She formulated an educational theory and method that incorporated her insights of child nature and development. A portion of her theory, referred to as “sensitive” times, occurs when children have a compelling desire to learn such skills as language usage, socialization, and mathematical computation. These “sensitive” periods are stages of readiness for specific learning based upon the child’s interests, needs, experiences, and maturity.

Guttek (1995) wrote:

She designed an instructional method and didactic materials to exploit these sensitive periods to their fullest educational advantage in the belief that once children had passed through a particular sensitive period, they will never again be

as adept in mastering the particular skill appropriate to that period. The teacher should study children's activities to detect when they are entering one of these periods of greatest sensitivity and then allow them the greatest possible freedom to develop the appropriate skill. (p. 273)

Norman Newberg. The newer and slightly different approach of creating clusters seeks to involve teams of teachers who take responsibility for groups of students over multiple years to improve the transitions from grade to grade and especially between school levels (Newberg, 1995). Clustering involves creating smaller and more caring units within the schools by requiring a team of teachers to work with the same group of students for several years while maintaining intentional, sustained communication and planning among teachers and other school personnel across grade and school levels. A cluster configuration organizes teachers' work across school boundaries to promote a collective sense of responsibility for student learning. This technique is especially beneficial to students with disabilities and those at-risk as it provides the continuity and support they often lack from home (Newberg).

Abraham Maslow. Abraham Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs (Slavin, 2006). Moving from the bottom to the top there are physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, to know and understand needs, aesthetic needs, and self-actualization needs. Maslow theorized that the lower needs in this hierarchy must be at least partially satisfied before a person will try to satisfy higher-level needs. Therefore, a student who does not feel accepted, loved, and a sense of belonging will unlikely have a strong motivation to achieve the higher need to know and understand.

German School System. Using similar ideas from Rudolph Steiner's theory, a

portion of the German school system continues to take a constructivist approach to learning. This method to learning is based upon three practices, one of which is multi-year grouping. Heterogenous groups of students are formed in first grade and remain together with the same teacher for the next four years (Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994).

Zahorik and Dichanz (1994) stated multi-year grouping helps students make connections during learning in several ways. First, because of the developing long-term relationship, teachers acquire a firm grasp of a student's prior school knowledge and information obtained outside of school. Second, teacher and student interactions over several years permits the teacher to understand each student's learning styles, behavior patterns, interests, emotional stability, and social skills. "With this knowledge, teachers can plan learning activities, provide materials and resources, and offer appropriate assistance to each child" (Zahorik & Dichanz, p. 75). Additionally, the authors asserted remaining with the same group of classmates over several years facilitates social construction of knowledge. When sympathetic, well-known friends are on hand to critique, challenge, and confirm, students' understanding is enhanced. Last, these long-term relationships result in an emotional and intellectual climate that encourages thinking, risk-taking, and involvement.

Ratzki (1988) described one specific type of German school, Koln-Holweide, which began in 1963. It was based upon the philosophy that relationships can affect academics; this educational approach keeps the same group of students together for six years along with a group of teachers who team teach during this period of time. This system's goal is to create a close-knit community within the larger educational structure. This unique approach has two aims: to diminish the anonymity that seems to come with large schools, and to design an instructional scheme in which, while working together,

students of various abilities and backgrounds can reach their potential.

To extend the community concept a step further within each classroom, students work with the same cooperative “table group” for at least one year and often longer (Ratzki, 1988). Each group contains five to six students integrated by gender, ability, and ethnic origin. Inside these groups, the children tutor and encourage each other. The author believes this system uses the students’ peer relationships to strengthen the school; a community of caring forms, but peer pressure is applied when necessary. Teachers are viewed as more than authority figures and education becomes more than just dispensing information. “We’ve found that if we do a good job of building the community, it’s much easier to convey the academic subjects. It’s easier because the students feel secure with their peer group and their teachers” (Ratzki, p. 41).

History of Looping

Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian educator, began the first Waldorf school to honor the request of Emil Molt, owner of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany (Barnes, 1991; Uhrmacher, 1995). Molt wished to provide an education for the factory workers’ children. Although not labeled as looping, the basic concept was first proposed by Rudolf Steiner and initiated in the Waldorf schools in 1919 (Uhrmacher). Various forms of Waldorf education are employed in other countries such as Scandinavia, Brazil, Argentina, Japan, and India. In Italian preschools, the children stay with the same teacher for three years, and parents are expected to take an active part in their children’s education (Reynolds et al., 1999). In Jamaica, the elementary schools are organized into divisions and the students remain with the same proctor and classmates throughout elementary school (Wynne & Walberg, 1994).

China groups students together from first through sixth grades, seventh through

ninth grades, and tenth through twelfth grades (Liu, 1997; Pecanic, 2003). During each segment, the same classmates stay together while moving to a new classroom each year. Teachers specialize in a subject and move from class to class during the school year, while the students remain in their own classroom (Liu). In looking for new progressive methods to educate their children, the government and education administrators within the United Kingdom are promoting child-centered methods compatible with Rudolph Steiner's philosophy. Currently with more than 800 schools worldwide, Waldorf schools are the second largest private school system in the world (Uhrmacher, 1995; Willis, 2009).

Within the United States, looping dates back to the one room school house. This was more out of necessity rather than choice (Simel, 1998). The current models of looping within the United States have been influenced more by the looping models found in other countries. The first Rudolph Steiner School was founded in New York City in 1928 (Reinsmith, 1989). This movement continued to grow, and there are now approximately 200 schools within the United States that follow the Waldorf form of education (Uhrmacher, 1995). In 1913, the U.S. Department of the Interior questioned whether children should move to a new teacher every year or if they should remain with the same teacher for two or more years. They wondered if this would permit the teacher to know the children more in-depth and to build on the knowledge of the previous year (Grant, Richardson, & Forsten, 2000). Yet, nationally this educational approach was never mandatory; consequently, the concept of a new teacher at each grade level became commonplace.

Later in the early 1970s, two institutions within the United States began incorporating the current model of looping (Geiger, 2000). The University of

Wisconsin's Research and Development Center developed an approach to elementary education called, "Individually Guided Education--The Multi-Unit Elementary School," later to be simply called IGE. Dr. Herbert Klausmeier, the main researcher and one of the primary principals of IGE, required his teachers to teach the same group of students for multiple years. In the 1970s and 1980s, the IGE model was implemented in thousands of schools around the country.

During this same time period, Deborah Meier, a New York City educator, began using multi-year assignments in her school in 1974 (Brown University, 1997; Goldberg, 1990; Hanson, 1995). Later in the early 1900s, the Attleboro Public School District in Attleboro, Massachusetts, was one of the first school districts within the United States to implement looping. Moving forward, other schools and school districts within the United States have followed this looping model (Grant, Johnson, et al., 1996; Pecanic, 2003).

Looping has been attempted in some form at all academic levels from pre-school to higher education within the United States. A portion of the philosophy of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1991) stated, "every attempt is made to have continuity of adults who work with children, particular infants and toddlers" (p. 40). Consequently, numerous pre-school facilities report practicing looping. An action research project carried out by a university affiliated childcare center in the southeast sought to document the process of looping at this level (Hedge & Cassidy, 2004). This project interviewed parents and teachers to gain insight into how looping affected the children, parents, and teachers. The results revealed both benefits and challenges, yet both parents and teachers in general viewed looping as a positive experience for them and their children.

Not only has looping been used in early childhood settings, it also has been

attempted during the middle school years, a time of emotional and social upheaval for many students (Lincoln, 1998). This turmoil can alter the students' academic experience, reported Lincoln. Some educators recognized this phenomenon and attempted to loop middle school classes to provide structure and consistency, while addressing the social, emotional, and academic needs of middle school students (Baran, 2008; Crosby, 1998; Kerr, 2002; McCown & Sherman, 2002). This may alleviate some of the challenges faced during this stage of life, stated Lincoln. Unfortunately, looping at the middle-school level is not without its critics. These opponents contended that looping should not happen in middle school at all. They assert the protected, cozy environment during this stage of life makes it even harder for students to adjust to high school (Hume, 2002).

Another slant to looping consists of looping a class and the teacher from one level of education to the next (Gragnolti, 2006). For example, a teacher moves with his or her class from elementary to middle school. Gragnolti stressed this approach is an effort to assuage the challenges of the transition from one school level to the next. Although some educators supported looping from elementary to middle school, Hume (2007) found others were hesitant to promote this inter-building looping, for example from middle school to high school. These critics argued, "looping at this critical time prevents students from forming the new social networks that are one of the prime benefits of high school; looping infantilizes teens when they should be developing both independence and responsibility" (Hume, p. 63).

A particular population with which looping has been attempted is gifted students (Guidry, 2008). Pratt (2009) wrote, "Gifted children face a number of social and emotional obstacles, such as perfectionism, lack of self-confidence, difficulty forming relationships, disorganization, isolation, and narcissism" (p. 23). After completing three

years in elementary school with the same class and gifted and talented teachers, gifted students completed a survey regarding their experience in a looped classroom. Pratt's subsequent analysis of the surveys revealed the students' academic needs were adequately met, and they gained more confidence, both socially and emotionally.

Although the concept of looping is logistically not possible in higher education, one professor of a Library and Media Resources Department took a novel approach to looping at the graduate level (Hooks & Corbett, 2005). The university librarian moved with the graduate cohort over a two-year course of study. The goal of this project was to introduce students to both scholarly research journals and mid-range professional journals, to discuss how they are different from other professional publications, and to instill in students the skills for researching educational issues. Student feedback to this endeavor disclosed positive results as the graduate students were more confident in the research process and the quality of research submitted.

Benefits for the General Classroom

As children loop with their classroom, their development is viewed in a less fragmented manner and in a more natural setting as a bond is created between the teacher and students (Kenney, 2007; Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992). The authors concluded this relationship results in various academic, social, and emotional benefits for the students.

Academic benefits. Looping permits the teacher to gain a firm understanding of the intellectual strengths and weaknesses of each child in the classroom, which allows the teacher to address and construct teaching strategies to meet individual needs as the children develop (Gaustad, 1998; Reynolds, et al., 1999). All children do not learn in the same way or at the same pace. As promoted by Jean Piaget (Bhattacharya & Han, 2001), children progress through cognitive developmental stages where they demonstrate new

intellectual abilities and more complex understandings of their surrounding world as time passes. They do not skip a stage, but enter each at different times, based upon their environment and background.

Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992) believed looping helps meet the individual cognitive needs of children as they progress through the developmental stages; a teacher can build in helpful activities over a longer period of time, which the students need to gain understanding. For example, Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) discovered how looping afforded slower students more time to learn basic skills. If a student is not reading at grade level at the end of the first year, the second year will allow the teacher to study and address the specific learning needs of that student. Perhaps the child has entered the “readiness” stage or “sensitive period” during the second year and is now recognized by his or her teacher as being cognitively ready to learn new reading skills (Gutek, 1995; Healy, 1991). The student is now given the opportunity to improve and to read at or above grade level at the end of the second year (Hitz, Sonners, & Jenlink, 2007). Reynolds et al. wrote, “a multi-year assignment at this age provides the gift of time that allows less mature children to ‘catch up’ with their peers, thus nullifying the need for retention” (p.18). George and Lounsbury (2000) viewed this as the teacher’s ability to work on long-term educational objectives while participating in looping.

A looping classroom’s additional focus on long-term objectives may improve students’ academic achievement. For example, Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1997) found that students who participated in a multi-year teacher-student assignment in East Cleveland, Ohio, exhibited substantially higher reading and mathematics achievement scores on standardized tests than students in the traditional grade organization, even when both groups were taught by the same teacher. Cistone and Shneyderman’s (2004)

empirical data also revealed higher reading and math scores for students who looped when compared to similar non-looped students.

Additional studies carried out by Krogmann and Van Sant (2000) assessed the effects of looping on students' academic growth. When Curriculum Based Monitoring reading fluency probes and the Gates-MacGinitie Standardized Reading Test were administered to a second grade class who had looped and a second grade class who had not looped, the results revealed greater growth in the looped classroom. After examining the results from STAR Reading and STAR Math assessments for students who had looped from second grade to third grade, Hertrich (2009) found similar results in both minorities and students of low socioeconomic status; the students who had looped outperformed their non-looping counterparts on both assessments.

Expanding upon the concept that looping improves the academic achievement of low socioeconomic students Fuller (2006) found looping resulted in a statistically significant improvement in language scores of students from the poverty group who looped from seventh to eighth grade. Ovalle (2004) concurred by stating how looping provided a supportive environment necessary for students from economically impoverished situations. The special attention they received from their teachers aided in their academic success.

In a quantitative study of standardized testing data, Gregory (2009) discovered a positive correlation between reading, writing, and math achievement and the degree of looping participation in middle school students. In contrast, Holmes (2008) examined the effects of looping and academic achievement in high performing schools in grades K-4. Holmes discovered no statistical difference between the reading and math scores between students who looped and students who did not loop. Likewise, Snoke's (2007)

examination of reading and math scores of fifth and eighth graders who looped and of fifth and eighth graders who do did loop indicated no significant academic difference between the two groups.

Despite the conflicting evidence regarding the effect of looping on students' academic achievement, looping has been found to provide increased instructional time in numerous ways (Grant, Richardson et al., 2000; Pecanic, 2003). At the conclusion of the year, Pecanic stated the looping model provides additional time to lay the groundwork for the second year instead of packing up the classroom. Summer homework can also be assigned to follow-up on the first year's objectives and to connect them with the second year's standards, stated Grant, Richardson et al. (2000). Furthermore, less time is needed to review classroom expectations, to assess students' skills, and to become familiar with their learning and personality styles during the first month of the second year; hence, the teacher can begin teaching sooner (Bafile, 2003; Freeman, Gum, & Blackbourn, 1999; Grant, Johnson et al., 1996; Hanson, 1995).

In addition, Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992) reported there is a seamless transfer of knowledge from the first to second year when the teacher is aware of the concepts and skills already attained by the students. Because teachers can build on the students' prior knowledge and previous experiences, they have the opportunity to cover an advanced curriculum. Consequently, teachers estimate they gain a month of learning time at the start of the second year (George & Lounsbury, 2000; Grant, Johnson et al., 1996).

With added time for instruction, teachers can create individualized programs to meet the specific needs of the students (Burke, 1996; Pecanic, 2003). One teacher stated, "I feel as if I can teach to their specific needs in a way that makes them feel comfortable and willing to take risks" (Kenney, 2007, p. 6). When the student takes risks and is

received in a supportive atmosphere, this leads to increased self-confidence; as a result, the student is more willing to take more risks, and the cycle continues (“The Benefits of Looping,” 2006). Looping also allows the teacher to address topics when students are developmentally ready by preparing age-appropriate activities (Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000; Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994)

Unfortunately, teachers often do not see what happens to their students at the next level. Also, teachers struggling to reach certain students may tell themselves, “If I can just get through this year, it will be over” (Geiger, 2000). With looping the teacher becomes more in-tuned to the long-term effects of their teaching, and they assume a greater sense of responsibility for the students’ success as they will have the same students for at least one more year (Gaustad, 1998; Newberg, 1995).

The consistency of expectations and the increased communication with parents result in additional benefits: students in looping classes enjoy school more, have fewer absences, have fewer discipline problems, and are less likely to drop-out of school (Forsten et al., 1997; Freeman et al., 1999). These advantages corroborated Cistone and Shneyderman’s 2004 study. Their data showed looping improved school attendance, reduced disciplinary problems, and decreased the number of students retained. In regard to discipline, a middle school teacher who moved with her math students from sixth to seventh grade underscored the positive by saying, “Every day, every hour in my classroom is a pleasure. I have no discipline problems – zip” (Black, 2000).

Social benefits. George and Lounsbury (2000) stated because of the failure of many families and communities to provide adequate opportunities for social bonding and membership, the school becomes an integral source in students’ social development. Student-teacher and student-student relationships all benefit in the looping structure

(Geiger, 2000; Kenney, 2007; “Multi-year Assignment,” 1998; O’Neil, 2004). Looping classrooms generally provide a strong community atmosphere that is beneficial for students who do not adapt well to new or changing situations and for students who have unstable home lives (Denault, 1999; Reynolds et al., 1999; Simel, 1998). Staying together for at least two years offers the students an opportunity to work more with all of their classmates; consequently, they get to know everyone in the class rather than just becoming close to a few friends. Justin and Jan, two students at Tolland Middle School, liked looping because they did not have to play the name game at the beginning of the year; they got to make more friends and could build on the friendships they already had (George & Lounsbury). Students interviewed in Pecanic’s (2003) study stated they liked knowing everyone’s names on the first day, and those who had difficulty making friends said they were glad they were with the same friends.

Looping with the same classmates offers additional social benefits. A sense of community and special bonds are created among the children as they share their achievements and disappointments, resolve problems, and learn to trust each other (Hitz et al., 2007; Kenney, 2007). “Each member of the class, including myself, strived to support all students in the class to achieve at their highest potential,” stated Ovalle (2004), an elementary school teacher who participated in three-year loops (p. 138). Bulau’s (2007) qualitative study, which utilized questionnaires and interviews, supported this idea. This study revealed how looping increased the students’ feelings of connectedness. Further, S. Holmes explained how her students even protected and helped each another with conflict outside of their classroom (personal communication, April 14, 2008).

Of particular interest, Westerfield (2009) studied the effects of looping on a

specific racial group. The author discovered how looping increased rural black middle school students' sense of belonging and continuity and communication among the students, parents, and teachers. Another advantage to this sense of community is children learn to work in a democratic society as they work together as a team. They gather experience with concepts such as responsibility, how to set priorities, and how to tell whether a decision is good or bad, which may affect the team (Crosby, 1998). The study performed by Krogmann and Van Sant (2000) revealed how on the first day of the second year the students who are already comfortable with each other could begin working easily in cooperative groups. Additionally, Gregory (2009) discovered how looping has a positive impact on social experiences as perceived by middle school students; however, looping revealed no measurable influence on student behavior and on discipline referrals when comparing eighth-grade students who looped with eighth-grade students who did not loop.

Rodriquez and Arenz (2007) conducted a qualitative study where teachers, parents, and students described their thoughts and feelings after participating in a looped classroom. Their answers revealed several positive trends in regard to the social relationships between the teachers and students. The participants valued looping as being fundamental in fostering long-term relationships between the students and their teachers. These relationships were viewed as significant in developing the students' self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of belonging. These benefits were in turn perceived as precursors to positive results in the students' academic achievement and attitudes toward their education.

Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) found further evidence of how looping lends to positive relationships, which results in a successful learning experience. In their study,

parents of children who looped from first grade to second grade completed a survey. The surveys revealed that parents rated the importance of teacher-student, teacher-parent, and student-to-student relationships more highly than they did their children's feelings about their classroom or more than the academic rigor of the classroom. Therefore, the authors' concluded how the social advantages of participating in a looped classroom may also influence the students' academic performance and their emotional outlook.

In addition to developing stronger interpersonal classroom relationships, Rodriquez and Arenz (2007) discovered that the relationship between the looping classroom teachers and the parents evolved into a stronger relationship built on trust and communication. Similarly, Hume (2007) reported that the parents, whose children looped, testified to their increased confidence in their children's teachers and that they felt more respected by the teachers. Also, when teachers from Ohio's Cleveland State University studied looping classrooms in East Cleveland's Project FAST (Families Are Students and Teachers), they discovered higher rates of parental participation (Black, 2000). The trust and respect between parents and teachers are vital relational components that may contribute to students having more positive attitudes toward learning.

Emotional benefits. At the beginning of the second year, Sue Kowalski, a middle-school teacher in New York, stated an atmosphere of trust and security was already present (George & Lounsbury, 2000). During the second year, the authors stated shy students feel confident about themselves and secure within the group, which allows them to come out of their shells. To illustrate how a student's confidence and security can increase during a second year, Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) cited the example of a shy first grade boy who thought little of himself, rarely participated in class discussions, and never raised his hand. After looping to second grade with the same

teacher and classmates, he was outgoing, self-confident, and his self-esteem was stronger. Other researchers also noted how shy students become more comfortable sharing their own opinions and filling certain leadership roles (Little & Dacus, 1999; Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992).

In Pecanic's (2003) study, one teacher noted that stronger teacher-student relationships allow the teacher to prioritize the emotional needs of the students. The author stressed the teacher's ability to know a particular student's behavior on stressful days and how to redirect the student back into a learning mode. Looping also helps teachers recognize major changes in a student's personality. "We're able to recognize danger signals and become pro-active when a student begins experimenting with drugs, alcohol, or other at-risk behaviors," stated Patricia Crosby, a teacher who looped with her middle school students (1998, p. 47). Children in looping classes are often more emotionally stable because they are familiar with the teacher's style and his or her expectations, thus making the transition from one grade to the next easier and less stressful (Kenney, 2007; Pecanic, 2003). However, Almeida's (2004) quantitative study on the impact of looping on fourth grader's self-concept revealed looping did not have an effect on the students' general self-concept.

Almeida's (2004) study also analyzed the impact of looping on fourth grade students' level of anxiety using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children. The researcher compared the results of fourth grade students who looped with the results of fourth grade students who did not loop and discovered lower levels of anxiety for those students who looped. In addition, Black (2000) stated looping can change the overall school climate. Prior to teachers looping, one elementary school principal stated teachers were frantic about getting through the school year and the students sensed the pressure.

“Teachers in looping classes are calmer, and the children are more cheerful and cooperative. Looping has helped make our school more gentle and caring” (Black, p. 41).

Remaining with the same teacher and classmates for more than one year not only enhances the students’ social relationships and emotional well-being, teachers who participated in the Delta Project believed meeting students’ social and emotional needs was a necessary pre-requisite to addressing their cognitive or learning needs (Pate et al., 1993). Therefore, the teachers believed moving with their students through the middle school years allowed them to more effectively address the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students.

Challenges for the General Classroom

While studies discussed and stressed the positive impact of looping (Chirichello & Chirichello, 2001; Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004; Pecanic, 2003) there are still challenges that may come with looping. For example, students may be placed with an ineffective teacher for more than one year (Grant, Richardson et al., 2000; Vann, 1997). Proponents dismissed this drawback by saying there should always be an opportunity for students to transfer out of a looped classroom (McCown & Sherman, 2002). Hume (2007) also noted even effective teachers have specific weaknesses; students will always be missing out on something, whether it is one teacher’s passion for music or another’s fervor for organization.

Looping offers additional challenges. Students who are victims of bullying or teasing may find themselves in an extremely negative situation if the teacher has not dealt properly with the problem (Vann, 1997). Students who are easily influenced by the strengths and weaknesses of those with whom they spend long periods of time may begin

to develop the same weaknesses (Forsten et al., 1997). Often, as stated above, shy students become more confident during the second year, which can be problematic as there might not be enough quiet personalities to offset stronger personalities (Pecanic, 2003).

Besides having to balance students' personalities, teachers should attempt new instructional strategies and activities during the second year. One second grader, who had looped, underscored this notion by stating, "I didn't like how we had you twice in a row because we had the same stuff and I was getting sick of it" (Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000, p. 24). Thus, if the teacher does not attempt new instructional techniques, the students may become bored, and possibly engage in negative behaviors ("Multiyear Assignment," 1998). A personality conflict between the teacher and a student is also a concern (Geiger, 2000). Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) reported a conflict between a teacher and a student can result in the teacher dealing with a difficult parent for an extended period of time. Conversely, one teacher viewed looping as "a motivation for working things out, knowing you'll have the student (and the parent) for two years" (George & Lounsbury, 2000, p. 47).

While the benefits of having a teacher for two consecutive years has been established, the eventual separation can be difficult for some students; for this reason, beginning the next school year with a new teacher can be problematic (Ovalle, 2004; Pecanic, 2003). Due to the teacher spending inordinate amounts of time and energy with his or her students, the conclusion of a looping cycle can be extremely emotionally draining for the teacher as well (M. Blankenship, personal communication, April 17, 2008). While the inevitable separation may be emotionally difficult, students may also have problems adjusting to larger school environments after being used to cloistered

ones. The students' ability to adapt to change may be affected (Bafile, 2004). One student stated:

The big disadvantage I saw was that in the real world I will probably have to make many changes in my life. Learning how to adapt to changes in the way you work is something that will help you adapt to change later on, and I think learning how to deal with change is something that should be learned when young. (Bafile, p. 2)

The inability to socialize with other students was a concern for some parents. The study by McCown and Sherman (2002) discovered a solution to this specific problem. Their students only looped in the core classes of English, math, social studies, and science. Hence, the looped students were mixed with non-looped students in physical education, art, keyboarding, and music. The socialization for the looped students was not a concern.

Although a number of articles noted how looping may cut down on discipline problems, the start of the second year may pose some classroom management problems (Gragaloti, 2006). Because the children are already comfortable with the teacher and are acutely aware of his or her weaknesses, the children will not go through the usual honeymoon period; they will begin testing boundaries at the start of the second year (S. Holmes, personal communication, April 14, 2008). Simel (1998) asserted over-familiarity between the teacher and students can lead to problems for some students in the later elementary grades. For example, students are aware of others' 'triggers' and who they can align with to cause trouble.

The teachers at Fresno Unified School District elementary school reported the effect of looping on discipline and classroom management was mixed (Rodriquez &

Arenz, 2007). Conversely, Indian Hills Middle School in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, designed a solution for students' behavior issues (McCown & Sherman, 2002). The authors stated with looping, the students already know the teachers' expectations from the previous year; therefore, the activities were self-directed, instead of teacher-directed. The students were given a task and chose to collaborate to accomplish the task in a timely manner. As a result, there were very few behavior issues, stated Linda Sirridge, a looping teacher (McCown & Sherman).

Further challenges of looping may involve the teachers' own insecurities and concerns with learning a new curriculum for the second year (Brown University, 1997; M. Blankenship, personal communication, April 17, 2008; Pecanic, 2003). Hitz et al. (2007), however, viewed learning new skills and curriculum as a benefit to teachers. Pecanic (2003) concurred with this idea as learning a new curriculum and instructional methods expands a teacher's professional repertoire. Kowalski, a teacher in New York, did not take issue with learning two curriculums. She viewed teaching two separate curriculums as making logical connections from where she and the students left off from the previous year (George & Lounsbury, 2000).

Benefits for Exceptional Students

Exceptional students fall into numerous categories: (a) students with learning, physical, or emotional disabilities; (b) students whose primary language is not English; (c) students who are at risk because they lack certain materials and social support; and (d) students who are gifted and talented (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Current writings and research discussed the benefits and challenges of looping for exceptional students who fall into these categories.

Academic benefits. The advantages for general classroom students may also

apply to exceptional students. Moreover, there are additional benefits of looping specific to exceptional students. For instance, at the beginning of the second year, the teacher is cognizant of each student's background information and IEP goals, and the teacher has established a rapport with the parents (Bafile, 2003). As stated earlier, better communication between teachers and parents has a positive effect upon students' academic experience (Rodriquez & Arenz; 2007). In addition, Krogman and Van Sant (2000) stated the process of special education referrals often takes the entire school year or longer to complete within a non-looped grade progression model. The referral process may not be completed at the end of the school year and the next year's teacher may need to start the entire process from the beginning. Thus, if a student has a disability and participates in a looped classroom, the teacher who is familiar with the student's academic needs has time to make an effective referral, and the student will receive the needed academic support in a timely manner.

Looping offers other benefits for exceptional students. "The emotionally supportive environment and extra instruction time help make inclusion successful," wrote Gaustad (1998, p. 2). For example, tutoring and assignments given over the summer and at the beginning of the second year can provide students with learning disabilities additional instruction and support; they can learn required concepts and be at grade level performance during the second year (Elliott & Capp, 2003). To illustrate the success of this model, McCown and Sherman (2002) cited the special education students who looped at Indian Hills Middle School in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, were working at grade level and meeting the expectations of the general curriculum by the end of the second year.

Another key advantage for students with special needs who loop is to establish

students' academic needs early and to provide teachers sufficient time to correct learning deficits, wrote Elliott and Capp (2003). A specific example of how looping can affect students with special needs was found at a middle-school in Miami, Florida (Bafile, 2003). This school chose to loop a group of students from sixth through eighth grades. When the eighth graders completed the Florida high-stakes FCAT exam, the author found the scores of those who looped were clearly above the eighth graders who did not loop. Minority students' scores were equal to non-minority students for the first time in school history.

In comparison to Bafile's (2003) findings, Thomas (2005) reported conflicting results. The author examined the effects of looping on exceptional students' reading and math achievement. The exceptional students in this study were a combination of gifted students, students with learning disabilities, students with language deficiencies, and students with physical challenges. Thomas concluded there was no statistical difference for either reading or math between the exceptional students who looped and the exceptional students who did not loop.

According to Newberg (1995), the unfamiliar environment and the different expectations of the new grade or school can exacerbate already-existing problems for students with special needs. On the other hand, students placed in a more continuous context of learning and caring, which looping can provide, have a greater chance of success, stated Elliott and Capp (2003). The authors noted the time teachers spend developing and integrating various instructional strategies in order to meet students' individual learning needs can postpone student retention decisions and reduce special education referrals. Grant, Johnson et al. (1996) underscored the positive impact of looping for students in first through eighth grades as the authors found a 43% decrease in

student retention and a 55% decrease in special education referrals.

In regard to student retention rates, apparently specific grades may benefit more from looping and prevent later drop-out rates. Because grades three and seven require students to master more skills, instruction is more challenging, behavior management is difficult, and student failure is more frequent, Freeman et al. (1999) considered the third and seventh grades to be “hot spots.” After examining the records on student dropouts, it was discovered that 50% of those who dropped out were retained or experienced significant academic difficulty in third grade, and 90% who dropped out were retained or experienced significant academic difficulty in seventh grade. The authors not only recommended looping during the third and seventh grades to facilitate success for students at-risk of dropping out, but they also suggested looping for the years prior to third and seventh grade as teachers can acquire an understanding of the students’ individual learning styles and specific deficiencies.

In addition to improving retention rates of at-risk students, Guidry (2008) discovered looping benefits gifted and talented students. The author compared the reading achievement scores of a gifted and talented class that looped from seventh grade to eighth grade and the reading achievement scores of an identical class that did not loop. The study found the students who remained with the same reading teacher for two consecutive years had significantly higher reading achievement scores than the class who did not loop. Interestingly, Guidry’s research did not find that looping resulted in any significant differences in achievement based on socioeconomic status.

Social benefits. Students with disabilities often carry social insecurities (Bryan, Burstein, & Ergul, 2004; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Transitions involving a change in environment, teacher, classmates, curriculum, and routines exacerbate these

insecurities for students with disabilities (Maras & Aveling, 2006; McCauley, 2010).

Transition needs of students with disabilities include skills to effectively navigate social situations and communicate one's needs, along with self-awareness and a positive self-concept. These challenges warrant collaborative interventions from the teacher, school counselor, administration, and parents (Milsom, 2007). Yet, in light of a looping classroom's inherent ability to create a consistent learning environment and positive social interactions, students with disabilities do not require additional interventions (Newberg, 1995).

In regard to a looping classroom's ability to facilitate learning for students with disabilities, Kenney (2007) stated these students feel more secure and are more willing to speak up, read aloud, and partner with other students. In addition, students with special needs have difficulty with acceptance, but in a looped classroom close friends are often more willing to assist their peers, regardless of their disability (Forsten et al., 1997). For English-language learners, looping provides additional time for them to improve their English-speaking skills. As English-language learners become comfortable with their teacher and classmates, they develop confidence in practicing their new language and may even assist other English-language learners who are new to the class or who have little knowledge of the U.S. culture (Brown University, 1997; Hitz et al., 2007).

As noted, participating in a looped classroom offers students with various special needs a more positive social experience. The report by David and Roger Johnson provides an additional benefit of looping for students with special needs. They stated the caring and committed relationships are especially effective for at-risk students who often are alienated from their families and society (as stated by George & Lounsbury, 2000).

Emotional benefits. At risk students often come from families living in poverty.

Newberg (1995) stated scarce resources and the stressors of poverty limit the energy these parents or guardians can give to the emotional and academic needs of their children. For this reason, these families cannot provide the necessary support at home or school to help their children succeed in school. Newberg suggested when teachers and administrators offer a caring environment that pays close attention to students' development over a period of time, a safety net is offered to assist students at risk of failing or dropping out of school.

In addition, children who find themselves in a fluctuating residence, family structure, or economic status benefit emotionally from the looping classroom's stability and teacher continuity, stated Nichols and Nichols (2002). McCown and Sherman (2002) reported how teachers already understood the emotional needs of each student; the teachers stressed this was particularly valuable for students with special needs. Toby Owens, a looping teacher in this study stated, "looping allowed the special education students to gain in skills, but more importantly in self-esteem, self-confidence, and peer relationships" (p. 20).

In relation to self-efficacy, the feeling of personal effectiveness, Thomas' 2005 study presented additional findings. Thomas' project examined the effects of looping on a variety of exceptional students: (a) gifted students, (b) students with learning disabilities, (c) students with language deficiencies, and (d) students with physical limitations. The results of this study offered no statistical significant difference on self-efficacy between the exceptional students who looped and a group of exceptional students who did not loop.

Challenges for Exceptional Students

To begin, when too many students with learning disabilities are placed within one

looping class, the number of stressors for the teacher may negate the benefits of looping (Brown University, 1997; Hanson, 1995). If a teacher has a student with a behavior problem, by the second year, a teacher may have exhausted all of his or her behavior management strategies (“Looping,” 1998). In reference to referrals for specific services, the looping teacher may delay the decision to refer, which would result in a student not receiving necessary assistance in a timely manner (Pecanic, 2003).

Summary and Conclusion

Rudolph Steiner, Jean Piaget, Dr. Jane Healy, Maria Montessori, Norman Newberg, and Abraham Maslow are educators or theorists who sought to provide a developmentally appropriate, child-centered educational experience for all children (Bhattacharya & Han, 2001; Gutek, 1995; Healy, 1991; Newberg, 1995; Slavin, 2006; Uhrmacher, 1995). Their work laid the foundation for the educational concept of looping as a means to address cognitive development, brain readiness, and sensitive periods where students are ready to learn certain concepts. Their approach to education also allows for the development of secure relationships between the teacher and the students and among the students.

The idea of looping began in the early 1900s and has since been used in many countries, including several school systems within the United States (Barnes, 1991; Geiger, 2000; Goldberg, 1990; Grant, Johnson et al., 1996; Liu, 1997; Reinsmith, 1989; Reynolds et al., 1999; Wynne & Walberg, 1994). Researchers and educators have examined looping and have noted the following benefits looping provides for the general classroom. Benefits within the academic realm include a time frame for teachers to address their students’ specific intellectual needs, which allows the teachers to implement various instructional techniques to meet those needs (Gaustad, 1998). Socially, looping

offers the opportunity for the class to form a strong sense of community, which builds support, trust, and accountability (Denault, 1999; Hitz et al., 2007; Kenney, 2007).

Because the teacher has more time to address the emotional needs of his or her students, children who loop can become more self-confident and emotionally stable (Little & Dacus, 1999; Pecanic, 2003).

Conversely, looping can present several challenges for the general classroom teacher. During the second year of the looping cycle, personality conflicts between the teacher and students may emerge, and teachers may encounter disciplinary problems with their students. Once the looping cycle is completed, the separation between the teacher and his or her students can also be a shortcoming of looping (Geiger, 2000; Gragnolati, 2006; Holmes, 2008; Pecanic, 2003).

Looping also affords benefits and challenges for exceptional students. The benefits include the teacher's familiarity with the students' IEP and the relationship that has already been established between the parent and the teacher (Bafile, 2003). With the ability to address academic needs early and the extra time to incorporate a variety of teaching methods, the teacher can be more successful at remediating academic deficiencies (Elliott & Capp, 2003). Socially, exceptional students find themselves in a more consistent, accepting atmosphere. This allows them to feel more comfortable with their friends and encourages them to take risks academically and socially (Kenney, 2007; Forsten et al., 1997). The consistent, caring environment provides emotional support often not realized in the homes of students at-risk (Newberg, 1995; Nichols & Nichols, 2002).

Still, looping also can present challenges for students with disabilities. A classroom with an inordinate amount of students with disabilities can overwhelm the

teacher (Brown University, 1997; Hanson, 1995). Addressing behavior issues and making intervention referrals for certain disabilities may be delayed. For this reason, exceptional students may not receive necessary assistance in a timely manner (Pecanic, 2003).

Current literature reviewed topics related to looping: (a) the basic definition of looping, (b) the alternative names for looping, (c) the theories upon which looping is based, (d) the history of looping in the United States and other countries, (e) the various academic levels at which looping has been attempted, and (f) the benefits and challenges of looping for both general classroom students and exceptional students. Regarding the advantages and challenges of looping, current literature addressed these issues from the perspectives of the teacher and seldom from the students and their parents. These writings were often anecdotal or editorial in nature. In addition, most of the empirically based information focused only upon the general classroom. An empirical project was necessary to gather information on the academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities, from the viewpoints of the teacher, the students with learning disabilities, and their parents and also from student artifacts and classroom observations. Therefore, a descriptive, phenomenological case study was executed to close the breach noted in current literature.

This phenomenological case study was conducted in a rural school district within the State of Virginia. The participants were five students with learning disabilities, their parents, and the teacher who looped. Interviews, questionnaires, examination of student artifacts, and observations were used to assess the academic, social, and emotional experiences of the students with learning disabilities who looped. Analysis of the data collected involved coding for themes notable to the individual students and also for

common themes among the five students. A detailed description of the data collection and data analysis is provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative inquiry was a descriptive phenomenological case study that sought to understand the experiences of students with disabilities who looped with their teacher from third grade to fourth grade. Specifically, this project examined the academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities. The research was carried out in the natural setting of an elementary school with a purposive sample of participants. This project gathered vivid details from interviews, questionnaires, student artifacts, and observations, which were conducted at the end of the fourth grade year. The information collected was analyzed and coded to find larger academic, social, and emotional themes specific to the individual participants with learning disabilities who looped; these individual themes constituted tier one. The data collected for each student and the themes derived from the data for each student were further examined and coded to find common academic, social, and emotional themes among the group of five students with learning disabilities who looped; these themes composed tier two.

This chapter lists the research questions and describes the appropriateness of the phenomenological case study design, the participants, and the setting. Data collection, which includes the selection of the site, the time schedule followed for data collection, the design of the student binders, the steps taken for parental consent, and the data collection methods for each guiding question, is also outlined. Next, the methods of data analysis for each guiding question and the acquisition of the academic, social, and emotional themes for tier one and tier two are described. Finally, the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of this project are explained.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

Guiding question 1. *How do the goals of the 2010-2011 Individual Educational Plans reveal the academic, social, and emotional experiences for students with learning disabilities who looped?*

Guiding question 2. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities, according to their parents?*

Guiding question 3. *According to the looping teacher, what are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities?*

Guiding question 4. *According to the students with learning disabilities, what are their academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping?*

Guiding question 5. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities as observed within everyday school activities?*

Guiding question 6. *What are the academic performances for students with learning disabilities who have looped as revealed in the students' STAR Reading and Math reports?*

Design Appropriateness

Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) stated a case study investigates a specific group of people. This project researched a group of five elementary students with learning disabilities. Case studies also explore a particular activity (Ary et al.). I explored the experiences of five students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) case studies are detailed examinations of

documents and or one particular event. As stated, this project investigated the experiences of looping for a group of five students with learning disabilities in an elementary school. In addition, a phenomenological study seeks to investigate a particular phenomenon and to understand the essence of an experience from the perspective of the participants (Ary et al., 2006). In order to understand the students' with disabilities experiences with looping, various data collection methods were used to gain the perspectives of the students with learning disabilities, of their teacher, and of their parents. The methods of data collection included: (a) a questionnaire completed by the parents of the students with learning disabilities, (b) interviews with the five students with disabilities and their teacher, (c) observations of the students during normal school activities, and (d) examination of the students' IEPs and STAR reading and math scores. Therefore, the phenomenological case study approach was the preferred research design for this project.

Phenomenological case studies also fall within the realm of qualitative research. This form of research collects soft data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The information collected is rich in description of people, places, and conversations. The questions seek to gain an understanding of behavior, thoughts, and experiences from the participants own frame of reference. Research questions are designed to investigate topics in all their complexity and within the natural context, when possible (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen).

The aforementioned characteristics of qualitative research are manifested within this phenomenological case study. The parental questionnaire answers, the interview notes, and the observation notes offered rich details of the students and their experiences while participating in a looped classroom. Also, the open-ended nature of the

questionnaire and interview inquiries allowed the participants to answer from their own frame of reference. Last, the information collected about the participants occurred within the elementary school and during normal school hours.

Additionally, Yin (1991) presented three standards researchers can use to determine if the qualitative design is best for one's project: (a) the phenomenon under investigation is contemporary, (b) the boundaries and context of the study are not distinct, and (c) the researcher has little control over the phenomenon being studied. Although looping has been an educational approach used by various school systems since the early 1900s (Barnes, 1991; Geiger, 2000; Goldberg, 1990; Grant, Johnson et al., 1996; Liu, 1997; Reinsmith, 1989; Reynolds et al, 1999; Wynne & Walberg, 1994), it is still being investigated today from a variety of perspectives (Baran, 2008; Bulau, 2007; Fuller, 2006; Gregory, 2008). The contemporary nature of looping along with the open-ended questions asked of the participants and the lack of controlled variables, allowed this current research to be qualitative in nature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Participants

The participants were four boys and one girl with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade, their classroom teacher, and their five parents. The students attended a rural elementary school in the State of Virginia. The five students with learning disabilities who looped were members of a class of 16 students. This class had nine males and seven females. Four of the five students who looped received free or reduced lunch. One-hundred percent of the students with learning disabilities were Caucasian. The demographics of the participant group were reflective of the school and the district population.

The IEPs for the student participants noted the following pertinent information: (a)

one boy had reading, math, and speech learning disabilities; (b) two boys had a reading disability; and (c) one boy and one girl had a speech disability. The students with a reading or math disability were pulled out of class daily for additional instructional assistance. The three students with a speech disability received speech therapy twice a week.

The classroom teacher completed her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from a four-year accredited college. She had a total of eight years of teaching experience. She has taught in an Adult Education program, sixth through eighth grade Title I reading classes, second grade for three years, third grade for two years, and fourth grade for one year. She also has been a Special Education Tutor. The teacher was in her third year of teaching at this elementary school when this phenomenological case study was conducted. The five parent participants were females of the Caucasian race.

The Setting

The school housed the following grades: (1) two pre-kindergarten classes, (2) two kindergarten classes, (3) two first grade classes, (4) two second grade classes, (5) two third grade classes, (6) one fourth grade class, and (7) one fifth grade class during the 2009-2010 academic year. For the 2010-2011 academic year, the number of classes remained the same except for the two fourth grade classes. There were 210 students and 25 staff and faculty. Sixty-nine percent of the students were on free or reduced lunch. Analysis of the school's racial demographics found 100% of the students were Caucasian. The demographics of the school were reflective of the district population. According to 2010 census data, the total population of the county was 45, 078, the median household income was \$35,830, and 15.9% of the population was below poverty level. The racial demographics of the county's population were as follows: (a)

Caucasian = 95.1%, (b) African American = 3%, (c) Asian = less than 1%, and (d) two or more races = less than 1% (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

This elementary school offered numerous programs to the students:

(a) Waterford Reading for grades Pre-K-second, (b) Success Maker Reading for grades three-five, (c) Title I Reading for grades K-five, (d) Reader's Theater for grades three-five and, (e) the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables program granted by the United States Department of Agriculture for all grade levels.

Procedures

Selection of the site. The site for this project was an elementary school located within a rural district of the State of Virginia. This setting was chosen based upon convenience and permission granted by the school principal. Permission was sought via a letter mailed to the elementary school principal (Appendix A). In addition, to receive approval from this school district, my proposal was submitted to, reviewed by, and approved by the following people in this order: Elementary Supervisor, Assistant Superintendent, and Superintendent. A letter on county letterhead was mailed from the district Superintendent to the principal of the elementary school granting permission for this study to be conducted on fourth graders with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade. I received a copy of the letter of consent via email from the county secretary.

In August, 2009, I met face-to-face with the principal to discuss the objectives of this project and to gather details about the school, the classroom of choice, the teacher, and the students. Based on the criteria set forth by me, the principal selected the target teacher and classroom for the study. I introduced myself to the classroom teacher and discussed the objectives of this project in May, 2010, the last month of the students' third

grade year.

Time schedule for data collection. The participants of this study looped from third grade to fourth grade with their teacher during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. In March of the fourth grade year prior to the collection of any data, I emailed the Application to Use Human Research Subjects and my proposal, which contained Chapters One, Two, and Three, the reference list, and appendices, to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I made the required revisions requested by the IRB, who approved the proposed study at the beginning of April. Data collection began in April and continued through the beginning of June during the students' fourth grade year.

Student binders. A binder for each looped student was created. The binders were labeled as Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E. There were three sections in each binder. For section one, dividers were installed to separate the six forms of data collection: IEP, Parent Survey, Teacher Interview, Student Interview, Observations, and STAR reports. For section two, a matrix for each of the first five forms of data collection was established. Categories for the academic, social, and emotional experiences were listed in each of the matrices. There was an IEP matrix, a Parent Survey matrix, a Teacher Interview matrix, a Student Interview matrix, and an Observations matrix. The table of STAR report scores was posted at the end of the matrices in section two. In section three academic, social, and emotional divisions were prepared in order to place the themes derived from the academic, social, and emotional categories listed in the five matrices and the STAR report table. Appendix B outlines the order of the binders.

Parental consent. In April, I met individually with the five parents of the students with learning disabilities in the principal's office. The principal was present during the

meetings. For the parents of the five student participants, I offered a brief description of the study and the types of data to be collected. I gave to each parent a copy of the Parent Consent for Child to Participate Form (Appendix C).

I emphasized the confidentiality of the data collected and the research results. In the final written document, the students names would be coded to Student A, B, C, D, or E. I permitted the parents to read the consent form and to ask any questions they may have had. The parents did not have any questions; they signed the Parent Consent for Child to Participate Form. I gave the parents a copy of the form to keep for their records. In the event the parents had questions or concerns, I highlighted my contact information.

Data Collection

The research methodologies used to collect data for each of the six guiding questions are listed in detail below.

Guiding question 1. *How do the goals of the 2010-2011 Individual Educational Plans reveal the academic, social, and emotional experiences for students with learning disabilities who looped?* During the month of April, I retrieved a copy of the IEPs for 2010-2011 for the students with learning disabilities who looped. This deviated from my original plan. Initially, I intended to review and compare the students' IEPs from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. However, the five participants' IEP meetings occurred either at the end of the third grade year or at the beginning of the fourth grade year. Due to the fact there would be no other IEP meetings for the fourth grade students, the principal of the school could only release the IEPs for the 2010-2011 year to me. The IEPs were coded to Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E and filed in section one of the IEP division of the students' corresponding binders.

Guiding question 2. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences*

of looping for students with learning disabilities, according to their parents? In April, during the meetings with the parents of the looped students, I gave the parents a Parent Participant Consent Form (Appendix D). The parents read the form and signed for their consent to participate. They were also asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix E) regarding their child's experience in a looped classroom. An envelope was attached with the name of the classroom teacher on it. The consent forms and questionnaires were coded to Student A, B, C, D, and E.

Four of the five parents completed the questionnaire and returned it to the classroom teacher in the sealed envelope. The classroom teacher collected the envelopes and gave them to me during my next observation day in April. At the end of May, a follow-up letter (Appendix F) was composed and sent to one parent who had not returned the questionnaire. This parent completed the questionnaire and returned it to the classroom teacher, who gave it to me during the first week of June. The signed consent forms and completed questionnaires were filed in section one of the Parent Questionnaire division of the students corresponding binders.

Item one in the questionnaire, "Describe what you have noticed about your child's academics while being with the same teacher for two years," provided information related to the academic aspect of guiding question number two. Items two and three, "Describe what you have noticed about your child's relationship with their teacher after being with her for two years" and "Describe what you have noticed about your child's relationships with their classmates after being with them for two years," addressed the social portion of guiding question number two. Items four, five, and six, "Describe any feelings your child has shared with you about their school work and grades after being with the same teacher and classmates for two years," "Describe any feelings your child

has shared with you about their relationships with their classmates after being with them for two years,” and “Describe any feelings your child has shared with you about how they feel about themselves after being with the same teacher and classmates for two years,” focused upon the emotional portion of guiding question number two. Last, item seven, “Describe your overall thoughts and feelings about your child being with the same teacher and students for two years,” attended to the academic, social, and emotional aspects of guiding question number two.

Guiding question 3. *According to the looping teacher, what are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities?*

The interviews were conducted individually using a face-to-face semi-structured interview in the teacher’s classroom during one planning period and one day after school in the month of May. This method of data collection was chosen to ensure the consistency of the questions asked for each student and to make certain the questions were aimed toward the goal of obtaining the teacher’s perspective. Face-to-face interviews were chosen to capture the nonverbal responses as the questions were asked and answered. These responses were noted as “observer comments” in the transcribed portion of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The teacher was reassured the answers would only be read by me, the answers would not affect her teaching status, and the final report would contain pseudonyms. The teacher read the Teacher Participant Consent Form (Appendix G) and signed for her consent to participate. A copy of this consent to participate form was filed in section one of the Teacher Interview division of the students’ corresponding binders. The Teacher Interview Form (Appendix H) was used as a guide as I asked questions about each student. The interview forms were coded as Student A, B, C, D, and E.

Utilizing a voice recorder application on an iPad, I recorded the interview sessions. This was done to ensure the accuracy of the interviews. Within two days of each interview, the voice recordings were transcribed into a word document. Each set of transcribed interview notes was coded for Student A, B, C, D, and E, printed, and filed along with a copy of the Teacher Interview Form in section one of the Teacher Interview division of the students' corresponding binders. After the recordings were transcribed and coded, they were copied onto a disc, which will be stored in a locked cabinet in my private office for a minimum of three years.

Interview question number one, "How has Student A improved or not improved academically?" addressed the academic portion of guiding question number three. Interview questions two and three, "How has Student A interacted with his or her peers?" and "How has Student A interacted with you?" answered the social experience section of guiding question three. Last, interview question number four, "How would you describe Student A's emotional adjustment" and "In what ways, if any, has this changed over the past two years?" attended to the emotional aspect of guiding question number three.

Research question 4. *According to the students with learning disabilities, what are their academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping?* The students' participation in interviews was based upon parental consent (Appendix C). The consent forms noted their child was selected based upon his or her disability. The parents were reassured the students' responses would be kept confidential and the answers given would in no way affect the students' academic progress. The parents read the Parent Consent for Child to Participate – Looped Form. They were given the opportunity to ask questions, and they signed for their consent for their child to participate. The forms were coded for each student as Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E and

filed in section one of the Student Interview division of the students' corresponding binders.

Student interviews took place on Monday and Tuesday mornings during the last week of the 2010-2011 school year. The students were interviewed in a resource room where they had frequented numerous times as a student. I chose the resource room in order to increase the students' comfort levels and to eliminate any potential distractions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) highlighted the importance of qualitative researchers recognizing how human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Therefore, I gathered data within the natural setting whenever possible. Actions are best understood when it is observed within the naturalistic environment (Ary et al., 2006).

The students gave verbal assent after I read to them a statement about the study (Appendix I). The format of the verbal assent form followed the form developed by Michelle L. Pecanic in her master's thesis (2003). A verbal assent form was coded for each student as Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E and filed in section one of the Student Interview division of the students' corresponding binders.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted, which gathered the students' thoughts and feelings about looping and also allowed me to note the students' nonverbal expressions to the questions. These responses were noted as "observer comments" in the transcribed notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was conducted using pre-established questions (Appendix J). This method of data collection was chosen to ensure the consistency of the questions asked for each student and also to make certain the questions were aimed toward the goal of obtaining the students' perspectives.

Utilizing a voice recorder application on an iPad, I recorded the interview sessions.

This was done to ensure the accuracy of the interviews. Within two days of each interview, the voice recordings were transcribed into a word document. Each set of transcribed interview notes was coded for Student A, B, C, D, and E, saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in section one of the Student Interview division of the students' corresponding binders. After the recordings were transcribed and coded, they were copied onto a disc, which will be stored in a locked cabinet in my private office for a minimum of three years.

Interview question one, "What do you think about being with the same teacher for two years?" addressed the academic and social aspects of guiding question four. Interview questions two and four, "How did being with the same teacher for two years make you feel?" and "How did being with the same classmates for two years make you feel?" described the students' social and emotional experiences. Last, interview question three, "What do you think about being with the same classmates for two years?" attended to the social dimension of guiding question four.

Guiding question 5. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities as observed within everyday school activities?* According to Burnsuck (1989), different settings may reveal different social behaviors; therefore, during the months of April and May, I observed and made field notes while seated or standing in an inconspicuous manner at varied times, places, and days on the school grounds. This is the prescribed protocol for gathering data within the natural setting, as actions are best understood when it is observed within the naturalistic environment (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data collection for the observations occurred on a Tuesday for the entire school day and on a Friday from 12:00 – 3:00 p.m. in the month of April. Data collection also was

carried out on a Wednesday from 1:00 – 3:10 p.m. and on a Monday for the entire school day in the month of May. Observations occurred during whole group language arts instruction, Virginia studies instruction, math instruction, physical education class, recess, and in the lunch room. Additional observations took place in the Special Education classroom for students with reading disabilities.

A checklist, which noted adaptive and maladaptive social behaviors towards the teacher and the students' classmates, was used (Appendix K). This checklist is based upon the model designed by Walker, Irvin, Noell, and Singer (1992) of interpersonal social-behavioral competence for school settings. This model describes both adaptive and maladaptive teacher and peer social-behavior domains and outcomes. The adaptive teacher-related adjustment behaviors results in teacher acceptance and school success, whereas the maladaptive domain is characterized by behaviors that disrupt the classroom, and result in teacher rejection, school failure, and referral to special education. The social behaviors in the adaptive peer-related adjustment domain are for the formation of friendships and peer acceptance. The maladaptive behaviors result in peer rejection or neglect (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Walker et al.).

Using checkmarks, I noted how often each student exhibited adaptive and maladaptive behaviors on a separate checklist for each student with a learning disability. In addition, details describing specific social behaviors were hand-written at the end of each checklist. The hand-written reports on social behaviors were typed into a word document, saved in an electronic folder, and printed. The checklists and typed observation notes were coded for Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E and filed in section one of the Observations division of the students' corresponding binders.

The original data collection process for guiding question five was intended to collect information on social behaviors only. Yet, after the examination of the observation notes, both academic and emotional experiences came to light. Therefore, I broadened this question to include the students' academic and emotional experiences along with their social experiences.

Guiding question 6. *What are the academic performances for students with learning disabilities who have looped as revealed in the students' Reading and Math STAR reports?*

In the month of April, permission to obtain the STAR assessment scores was gathered from the parents of the students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade (Appendix C). In May, the STAR Reading and Math scores were collected from the school principal for the five students with learning disabilities. The scores were listed in a simple table (Appendix L) for Students A, B, C, D, and E. The table included the end of year reading and math grade-equivalent scores for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years. It was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and placed in section one of the STAR Report division of the students' binders.

Data Analysis

Data was collected from the following sources: IEPs, Parent Questionnaires, Teacher Interviews, Student Interviews, Observations, and STAR reading and math reports. The information gathered provided the requisite data to answer the six guiding questions.

Guiding question 1. *How do the goals of the 2010-2011 Individual Educational Plans reveal the academic, social, and emotional experiences for students with learning disabilities who looped?* For Student A, I made two copies of the IEP for 2010-2011.

The original set and one copy were filed in a binder labeled “Original Copies.” The second copy was filed in section one under the IEP division in Student A’s binder. This copy was examined and highlighted in order to identify repetitive words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices reflective of the student’s academic, social, and emotional experiences. Those related to academics were highlighted in “orange,” those related to social interactions were highlighted in “green,” and those related to emotional experiences were highlighted in “blue.”

Based upon the terms defined in Chapter One, I determined under which category the highlighted words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices should be placed: academic, social, or emotional (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I typed into a simple matrix the highlighted academic, social, and emotional data noted in the IEP. The data in each section of the matrix was reviewed to ensure they belong in that category (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). After categorization was completed, I reviewed the IEP in Student A’s binder to determine if additional areas in the IEP needed to be highlighted and considered for a category, as suggested by Ary et al. If additional data was placed into the academic, social, or emotional categories, it was highlighted and typed into its corresponding category in the matrix. The IEP matrix was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in section two of Student A’s binder. This step-by-step process was repeated for Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E.

Guiding question 2. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities, according to their parents?* For Student A, I made two copies of the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix E). The original set and one copy were filed in a binder labeled “Original Copies.” The second copy was filed in section one under the Parent Questionnaire division in Student A’s binder. This

copy was examined and highlighted for repetitive words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices. Those related to academics were highlighted in “orange,” those related to social interactions were highlighted in “green,” and those related to emotional experiences were highlighted in “blue.”

Based upon the terms defined in Chapter One, I determined under which category the highlighted words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices should be placed: academic, social, or emotional (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I typed into a simple matrix the highlighted academic, social, and emotional data noted in the Parent Questionnaire. The data in each section of the matrix was reviewed to ensure they belong in that category (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). After categorization was completed, I reviewed the Parent Questionnaire in Student A’s binder to determine if additional areas in the Parent Questionnaire needed to be highlighted and considered for a category, as suggested by Ary et al. If additional data was placed into the academic, social, or emotional categories, it was highlighted and typed into its corresponding category in the matrix. The Parent Questionnaire matrix was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in section two of Student A’s binder. This step-by-step process was employed for Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E.

Guiding question 3. *According to the looping teacher, what are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities?* For Student A, I made two copies of the transcribed Teacher Interview notes. The original set and one copy were filed in a binder labeled “Original Copies.” The second copy was filed in section one under the Teacher Interview division in Student A’s binder. This copy was examined and highlighted for repetitive words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices. Those related to academics were highlighted in “orange,” those

related to social interactions were highlighted in “green,” and those related to emotional experiences were highlighted in “blue.”

Based upon the terms defined in Chapter One, I determined under which category the highlighted words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices should be placed: academic, social, or emotional (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I typed into a simple matrix the highlighted academic, social, and emotional data noted in the Teacher Interview notes. The data in each section of the matrix was reviewed to ensure they belong in that category (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). After categorization was completed, I reviewed the Teacher Interview notes in Student A’s binder to determine if additional areas in the Teacher Interview notes needed to be highlighted and considered for a category, as suggested by Ary et al. If additional data was placed into the academic, social, or emotional categories, it was highlighted and typed into its corresponding category in the matrix. The Teacher Interview matrix was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in section two of Student A’s binder. This step-by-step process was repeated for Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E.

Guiding question 4. *According to the students with learning disabilities, what are their academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping?* For Student A, I made two copies of the transcribed Student Interview notes. The original set and one copy were filed in a binder labeled “Original Copies.” The second copy was filed in section one under the Student Interview division in Student A’s binder. This copy was examined and highlighted for repetitive words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices. Those related to academics were highlighted in “orange,” those related to social interactions were highlighted in “green,” and those related to emotional experiences were highlighted in “blue.”

Based upon the terms defined in Chapter One, I determined under which category the highlighted words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices should be placed: academic, social, or emotional (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I typed into a simple matrix the highlighted academic, social, and emotional data noted from the Student Interview notes. The data in each section of the matrix was reviewed to ensure they belong in that category (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). After categorization was completed, I reviewed the Student Interview notes in Student A's binder to determine if additional areas in the Student Interview notes needed to be highlighted and considered for a category, as suggested by Ary et al. If additional data was placed into the academic, social, or emotional categories, it was highlighted and typed into its corresponding category in the matrix. The Student Interview matrix was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in section two of Student A's binder. This step-by-step process was employed for Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E.

Guiding question 5. *What are the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities as observed within everyday school activities?* For Student A, I made two copies of the Social Competence Checklist (Appendix K) and the typed observation notes. The original set and one copy were filed in a binder labeled "Original Copies." The second copy was filed in section one under the Observations division in Student A's binder. This copy was examined and highlighted for repetitive words, phrases, patterns of social behavior. Those related to academics were highlighted in "orange," those related to social interactions were highlighted in "green," and those related to emotional experiences were highlighted in "blue."

Based upon the terms defined in Chapter One, I determined under which category

the highlighted words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices should be placed: academic, social, or emotional (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I typed the highlighted academic, social, and emotional data noted from the Social Competence Checklist along with those from the typed observation notes into a simple matrix. The data in each section of the matrix was reviewed to ensure they belong in that category (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). After categorization was completed, I reviewed the Social Competence Checklist and the typed observation notes in Student A's binder to determine if additional areas in the Social Competence Checklist and in the typed observation notes needed to be highlighted and considered for a category, as suggested by Ary et al. If additional data was placed into the academic, social, or emotional categories, it was highlighted and typed into its corresponding category in the matrix. The Observations matrix was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in section two of Student A's binder. This step-by-step process was repeated for Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E.

Guiding question 6. *What are the academic performances for students with learning disabilities who have looped as revealed in the students' STAR Reading and Math reports?* The STAR Reading and Math grade-equivalent scores were gathered for each student and placed in a table (Appendix L). This table included the students' scores at the end of both the third grade year and the fourth grade year. I subtracted the third grade grade-equivalent score for each student from the fourth grade grade-equivalent score for both reading and math. The differences between the scores were noted in the table. I examined the differences to determine if they supported the academic data collected from the IEP, the Parent Questionnaire, the Teacher Interview, the Student Interview, and the Observations for each student.

Therefore, further supporting or not the academic data collected from the IEP, the Parent Questionnaire, the Teacher Interview, the Student Interview, and the Observations for the group of students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade (Ary et al., 2006; Moore, 2007).

Tier One: Themes for Each Individual Student

To begin, I created three separate word documents labeled: Academic Themes, Social Themes, and Emotional Themes (Appendix M). To form themes applicable to each student, I sought data triangulation. Ary et al. (2006) stated “the researcher wants to find support for the conclusions in more than one data source” (p. 505). Also, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) confirmed that when multiple sources of data are in agreement, a fuller understanding of the phenomenon being studied is acquired. Therefore, when an idea was noted in three or more sources of data, a strong theme was documented. When an idea was located in only two sources of data, a weak theme was recorded.

I then analyzed the academic category of the six matrices in section two of Student A’s binder in order to find themes pertinent to Student A. Common words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices noted in the various data sources were documented as academic themes. Both strong and weak academic themes were listed in the Academic Themes document for Student A. This document was saved in an electronic file, printed, and placed in the Academic division of section three in Student A’s binder.

Next, I examined the social category of the six matrices in section two of Student A’s binder in order to find themes applicable to Student A. Common words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices noted in the various data sources were recorded as social themes. Both strong and weak social themes were listed in the Social Themes

document for Student A. This document was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and placed in the Social division of section three in Student A's binder.

Finally, I analyzed the emotional category of the six matrices in section two of Student A's binder in order to find themes pertinent to Student A. Common words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices recorded in the various data sources were noted as emotional themes. Both strong and weak emotional themes were listed in the Emotional Themes document for Student A. This document was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and placed in the Emotional division of section three in Student A's binder. The process I utilized to analyze the academic, social, and emotional themes for Student A was repeated for Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E.

Tier Two: Themes Among the Five Students

To complete a second tier, I examined the Academic, Social, and Emotional Theme documents for the five students with learning disabilities who looped. To form common themes among the five students with learning disabilities, I sought data triangulation. Ary et al. (2006) stated "the researcher wants to find support for the conclusions in more than one data source" (p. 505). Also, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) confirmed that when multiple sources of data are in agreement, a fuller understanding of the phenomenon being studied is acquired. Therefore, when an experience was noted for three or more of the students, the experience was documented as a strong theme. When an experience was noted for only two students, the experience was recorded as a weak theme.

To begin, I thoroughly examined the Academic division of section three in each student's binder. Common words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices were highlighted to make connections among the five student participants. In addition, I

reexamined the IEP, the STAR reports, the parent questionnaire, the teacher interview notes, the student interview notes, and the observation notes for all five students to identify additional common themes among the students. I highlighted both the strong and weak themes, then copied and pasted both sets of themes into a word document titled Academic Themes Among the Students (Appendix N). This document was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in a binder labeled “Academic Themes Among the Students.”

Next, I thoroughly examined the Social division of section three in each student’s binder. Common words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices were highlighted to make connections among the five student participants. Additionally, I revisited the IEP, the parent questionnaire, the teacher interview notes, the student interview notes, and the observation notes of all five students to identify additional common themes among the students. I highlighted both the strong and weak themes, then copied and pasted both sets of themes into a word document titled Social Themes Among the Students. This document was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in a binder labeled “Social Themes Among the Students.”

The final aspect of Tier Two examined the Emotional division of section three in each student’s binder. Common words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices were highlighted to make connections among the five student participants. Next, I reexamined the IEP, the parent questionnaire, the teacher interview notes, the student interview notes, and the observation notes of all five students to gather additional common themes among the students. I highlighted both the strong and weak themes, then copied and pasted both sets of themes into a word document titled Emotional Themes Among the Students. This

document was saved in an electronic folder, printed, and filed in a binder labeled “Emotional Themes Among the Students.”

Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, Transferability

Credibility. Credibility, the truthfulness of my observations, interpretations, and conclusions, was sought through structural corroboration, data triangulation, and reflexivity (Ary et al, 2006). Structural corroboration was gathered through the multiple forms of methodologies: questionnaire, interviews, observations, and assessment scores. Data triangulation was acquired by collecting data and forming categories and themes from three or more data sources, for example, interviews, questionnaires, artifacts, and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). During data collection, I kept a reflective journal, which documented my thoughts, feelings, ideas, questions, concerns, problems, and frustrations. This reflexivity was used to recognize any biases as the data was collected (Ary et al.).

Dependability. Dependability, my ability to demonstrate that the methods used are reproducible and consistent, was sought through several avenues (Ary et al., 2006). I ensured the study’s methods are reproducible through detailed documentation of how the study was conducted, including what was done and when. This audit trail includes descriptions of the sample population, context, methods of data collection, including detailed field notes, audio-recordings, and other descriptive material. These descriptions enable others to review and duplicate this research. Future researchers can determine the dependability of the procedures and confirm whether or not the findings are logical. Structural corroboration from the multiple methods and data sources further added to the dependability of the research findings (Ary et al.).

Confirmability. Confirmability or neutrality is the extent to which the research is

free from bias (Ary et al., 2006). Through the established audit trail, confirmability was supported. Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest as the data is collected, reviewed, and interpreted, the researcher must continually confront his or her personal opinions and prejudices with the data. While recording detailed field-notes, I interjected my subjective, personal opinions. I referred to one of the objectives of a phenomenological case study: to not form opinions or to pass judgements, but to add to the current knowledge and research on looping. This reflexivity further maintained confirmability (Bogdan & Biklen).

Transferability. The detailed explanations of the methodologies and data analyses manifested a seamless transfer of the phenomenological case study's themes (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Descriptive adequacy was sought through a detailed description of the context where the research occurred as well as of the participants who were examined (Ary et al, 2006). Future inquirers will, therefore, be able to determine if this research is transferrable to other settings, participants, methodologies, or data analyses.

Summary

This chapter described the appropriateness of the case study design, the participants, and the collection site. The steps for data collection, which included the time schedule followed, the steps taken for parental consent, the design of the student binders, and the data collection methods for each Research question were also outlined. Next, the methods for data analysis for each Research question and the acquisition of the academic, social, and emotional themes for tier one and tier two were described. Finally, the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of this project were explained.

The next chapter describes in detail the results of the collected data. The

academic, social, and emotional themes for each student are highlighted, and the common academic, social, and emotional themes discovered among the group of five students with learning disabilities who looped are outlined.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The goal of this phenomenological case study was to examine the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade. Data was collected in the natural setting of an elementary school, with a purposive sample of participants. The participants included the teacher who looped, the five students with disabilities who looped, and their parents. This phenomenological case study gathered descriptive details through the following: (a) a parent questionnaire, (b) teacher and student interviews, (c) examination of the students' IEPs, (d) examination of the students' STAR reading and math scores, and (e) observations during normal school activities.

The data collected in this study was coded and placed into matrices, which listed the following pre-established categories: (a) academic, (b) social, and (c) emotional experiences. The three categories within each matrix were analyzed to identify specific themes for the individual student participants; these themes completed tier one of this phenomenological case study. The themes highlighted for the individual students and the categories within each matrix were further examined to find common themes among the five students; these themes completed tier two of this phenomenological case study. This chapter notes the academic, social, and emotional themes identified for each of the five students with learning disabilities who looped and also highlights the common themes applicable among the five students with learning disabilities who looped.

Academically, the five student participants who looped improved in reading, but were still below grade level at the end of fourth grade, with the exception of one student.

The five participants who looped also improved in math, but two students were still below grade level at the end of fourth grade. Socially, the five students displayed adaptive teacher-related and peer-related social behaviors. They were also comfortable interacting with other adults. Emotionally, the five students were comfortable with and liked their teacher and classmates, showed improvement in their self-confidence, and often smiled and laughed.

Tier One

Student A - Academic. For student A, several themes related to academics were found. This student continued to perform below grade level in reading and math, but his or her overall academic achievement did improve from third grade to fourth grade. This student also was willing to take risks through class participation.

The strong theme of academic performance below grade level in reading and math was disclosed. As shown in Table 4.1., the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores revealed an improvement in reading from third grade to fourth grade. However, this student’s reading ability was still below grade level. This was further confirmed by both this student’s IEP and the teacher interview. When interviewed, Student A validated this by saying, “I’m not good at reading.”

Table 4.1

STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student A

Student A	3rd-grade	4th-grade	Change
Reading	2.9	3.6	0.7
Math	3.2	3.5	0.2

Note. The grade equivalent score is a norm-referenced score ranging from 0.0 to 12.9+. It represents how a student’s test performance compares with that of other students nationally.

For Math, as noted in Table 4.1, the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores reported an improvement from third grade to fourth grade, but Student A's ability in math was still below grade level. On the other hand, the teacher and student interviews both confirmed Student A had improved overall academically during this student's fourth grade year. A third, yet weaker theme arose: this student was not afraid to raise his or her hand and answer questions in class. The teacher stated Student A often took chances of being wrong. This was supported by the observation notes.

Social. For Student A, several themes connected to social experiences were found. This student maintained effective teacher-related and peer-related social behaviors and interactions, was comfortable speaking to other adults, was quiet and reserved, and received academic support from his or her peers. The Social Competence Checklist disclosed several themes related to adaptive teacher-related social behaviors. These behaviors were recognized within various school-day settings. Student A often followed directions and rules, complied with the teacher, listened to the teacher, worked independently, and finished his or her class work.

The theme of working independently was confirmed by the teacher interview and the observation notes. The themes of complying with the teacher and following directions were also supported by the observation notes. Additional teacher-related social behaviors were noted in the IEP, the observation notes, and the teacher interview. Student A was friendly toward the teacher and comfortable around the teacher. At times, this student talked to the teacher about personal interests not related to school.

The Social Competence Checklist also revealed a theme related to adaptive peer-related social behaviors. Student A often affiliated with peers during various school-day settings. This theme was confirmed through the IEP, the observation notes, and the

teacher and student interviews. Student A was comfortable with his or her classmates. This student stated, “they knew me real good; they didn’t be mean to me.” Conversations with both boys and girls and student participants and non-participants occurred often. This student played with boys and girls during physical education class and recess and interacted in a friendly manner toward his or her peers. Student A considered all classmates his or her friend.

Student A demonstrated additional social behaviors and these behaviors were noted in the observation notes, the teacher interview notes, and the student interview notes. Student A spoke to other staff, such as the school librarian and the teacher-aid, about issues unrelated to school. This student regularly spoke to me and asked me questions. Although Student A often verbally interacted with peers, this student had a quiet nature. This student tended to stay away from those who were boastful, said the teacher. When asked how he or she would feel if he or she had the same classmates next year, Student A concurred by stating, “kinda good; I wouldn’t be with snobby people.” Last, Student A’s classmates were supportive. When assistance was needed with reading, this student’s classmates assisted Student A voluntarily or when asked by the teacher to help Student A.

Emotional. In regard to Student A’s emotional experiences, several themes emerged in the collected data. These themes included Student A’s emotional growth from third grade to fourth grade and his or her thoughts and feelings about the teacher and his or her classmates. Student A became more comfortable with school and his or her classmates during the fourth grade year, and Student A stated, “It felt good to have the same classmates for two years.”

In third grade, Student A was very quiet, timid, afraid to speak up, and afraid to

answer questions, reported the teacher. Conversely, in fourth grade, Student A frequently smiled and laughed while demonstrating more self-confidence and security. This was noted in the teacher interview notes and the observation notes. In addition, the teacher stated Student A will not be intimidated by a new teacher next year. When asked how he or she felt about having a new teacher next year, Student A confirmed and said, “I look forward to a new teacher.”

The teacher stated Student A was intimidated by her. This was reinforced by the parent questionnaire, which noted Student A felt the teacher did not like him or her. Although Student A’s self-confidence improved, “there was room for growth,” said the teacher. This student, at times, felt overwhelmed. The teacher noticed these reactions in Student A’s verbal and facial expressions. Furrowed eyebrows displayed by Student A during class assignments were also highlighted in the observation notes.

Student B - Academic. In relation to Student B’s academic performance, several themes emerged. This student consistently performed above grade level in reading and math, demonstrated improved academic performance, gave school work his or her best effort, often participated in class, and improved in his or her speech abilities. For Student B, the larger theme of academic performance above grade level in reading and math was found. As noted by the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores in Table 4.2., Student B improved in reading from third grade to fourth grade. This student performed above grade level in third grade and fourth grade. Student B’s reading ability was further substantiated by the teacher, who reported Student B had moved from the 70th percentile to the 90th percentile on another reading assessment.

Table 4.2

STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student B

Student B	3rd-grade	4th-grade	Change
Reading	5.2	6.5	1.3
Math	6	6.3	0.3

Note. The grade equivalent score is a norm-referenced score ranging from 0.0 to 12.9+. It represents how a student’s test performance compares with that of other students nationally.

Likewise, Student B was above grade level in math, as noted in Table 4.2. The teacher confirmed this was normal academic performance for Student B. “Student B is typically an A student,” stated the teacher. The parent questionnaire and the teacher and student interviews agreed as they stated Student B had improved academically during his or her fourth grade year.

Data from the teacher interview, the IEP, and the observation notes found that Student B gave his or her best effort toward his or her school work. Student B also raised his or her hand to answer questions in class; the answers given were usually correct. In addition, the teacher stated Student B’s speech improved from third grade to fourth grade. However, Student B continued to require assistance in correct articulation and pronunciation of words. This was noted in the IEP and in the observation notes.

Social. Analysis of Student B’s social experiences revealed several themes. This student demonstrated effective teacher-related and peer-related social behaviors and interactions, was quiet and gentle, was comfortable speaking to me, and positively viewed having different friends other than those in his or her current class.

The Social Competence Checklist and observation notes highlighted several adaptive teacher-related social behaviors. In particular, the checklist and notes found that

Student B worked independently, followed directions and rules, and finished his or her class work. The teacher agreed Student B was a rule follower. The teacher and student interviews revealed additional common social behaviors. In comparison to third grade, Student B talked more to the teacher during fourth grade. Often, conversations involved topics unrelated to school. This student said, “She knows us; she knows how we act and stuff.” The parent confirmed this positive relationship between the teacher and student. She said, “The relationship with the teacher has been good.”

The Social Competence Checklist also revealed adaptive student-related social behaviors. For example, Student B affiliated with peers, cooperated with peers, and supported peers. These themes were further supported by the teacher and student interviews, the parent questionnaire, and the observation notes. Despite Student B’s quiet nature, he or she verbally interacted with boys and girls, but usually played with boys during recess and physical education. This student also affiliated with student participants and non-participants. Student B cooperated with peers. The following examples illustrate the cooperation that existed between Student B and his or her peers: (a) trading half of a snack for a chicken strip during lunch, (b) giving a student his or her jump rope in gym class, (c) sharing answers during small group activities, and (d) standing up for a student who was called “mean” by saying, “No, she ain’t!”

The parent and teacher concurred that Student B talked more this year, and this student said, “You ain’t shy.” Student B thought it was a good thing to have the same classmates for two years. This student also said he or she knew his or her classmates well and that this student liked all of his or her classmates. My child liked everybody, confirmed the parent. Although Student B endorsed the idea of being with the same classmates for two consecutive years, Student B also said, “You get tired of them.” This

was later substantiated by Student B, who stated, “It was good to be with different friends in Virginia studies class.”

The IEP, the teacher interview, and the observation notes revealed that Student B was quiet, gentle, and soft spoken. Student B sat quietly, worked quietly, and was frequently asked to read louder during class read-alouds. Despite his or her quiet nature, Student B was comfortable speaking to me. When standing or sitting close to me, this student asked me questions or shared his or her thoughts and feelings about himself or herself, or talked about what was happening nearby.

Emotional. Examination of the parent questionnaire, the teacher and student interviews, and the observation notes illuminated several themes associated with Student B’s emotional experiences. These themes involved this student’s thoughts and feelings toward school, the teacher, and his or her classmates, along with Student B’s typical disposition and level of confidence.

Specifically, the data revealed that Student B was comfortable with school, the teacher, and his or her classmates. Student B said he or she looked forward to coming to school, and the parent said looping had been a good thing. Student B felt good about having the same teacher and liked his or her classmates. To illustrate the pleasure Student B had in regard to his or her classmates, a smile often covered this student’s face. A happy and self-confident student was consistent from third grade to fourth grade. “Student B will always be Student B,” reported the teacher.

Student C - Academic. In relation to Student C’s academic performance, there were several themes found in the data. Student C made improvements in reading and math, but still performed below grade level and required accommodations in most subject areas. The data also noted Student B was eager to learn and participate in class, rushed

through assignments, and often received reading support from classmates. The first, and most compelling theme pertinent to Student C, was his or her below grade level academic performance in reading and math. As noted in Table 4.3., the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores revealed Student C improved slightly in reading from third grade to fourth grade. However, Student C’s reading ability was still below grade level. This was further confirmed by this student’s IEP and during my interview with the teacher.

Table 4.3

STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student C

Student C	3rd-grade	4th-grade	Change
Reading	2.1	2.5	0.3
Math	3.4	3.9	0.5

Note. The grade equivalent score is a norm-referenced score ranging from 0.0 to 12.9+. It represents how a student’s test performance compares with that of other students nationally.

The IEP showed that Student C was below grade level, specifically in the areas of word recognition, word fluency, and decoding fluency. Student Cs teacher also cited the results of another reading assessment. The assessment determined Student C’s reading ability was between the 10th -19th percentile, which was below grade level. According to Student C’s IEP, he or she received read aloud accommodations in all subject areas.

Along with the teacher interview notes, the observation notes revealed Student C frequently approached the teacher’s desk to have various portions of worksheets reread. In addition, Student C requested the teacher often read aloud both questions and answer options on tests. The teacher reported Student C was too timid and shy in third grade to ask her to go back and reread anything, but this was not the case in fourth grade. Student C was more comfortable this year to come to her and say, “I need help.” This student’s

comfort in asking for help in fourth grade from the teacher was validated during the classroom observations. Student C would not volunteer to read aloud in class, but raised his or her hand to answer various questions in language arts.

As noted in Table 4.3., the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores revealed a slight improvement in math from third grade to fourth grade. This student recognized his or her improvement in math, which was also validated by the teacher. On another math assessment, the teacher reported Student C moved from the 18th-19th percentile to the 40th percentile. Despite Student C's improvement in math, his or her math performance was still below grade level, which was confirmed by this student's IEP and by the teacher interview.

Student C showed a sincere interest in math; they had assignments ready when math class began, participated in math lessons, and answered correctly math questions during direct instruction. The teacher noted Student C had learned his or her multiplication tables. This was substantiated by the observation notes, which showed student C completed a multiplication chart with no assistance from the teacher or classmates. When Student C had math exercises to complete, he or she needed accommodations, which included having questions read aloud and using a calculator. The teacher felt Student C needed to learn the correct steps for completing math problems, even though a calculator was provided.

The teacher reported and the IEP noted Student C was eager to learn. This student was the first to raise his or her hand if he or she thought he or she knew an answer, gave 100 percent in class, managed his or her time well, and did not mind to step out and take a chance on being wrong. This was supported by the classroom observation notes. However, if Student C's work was not read aloud, then he or she often rushed

through assignments. Student C quickly marked answers and often be the first to finish an assignment. The teacher stated, “The student wanted to get it over with because it was so hard.”

Student C stated his or her classmates helped him or her with reading and spelling. “Do you want me to go read to Student C?”, or “Can I go help Student C?” were often questions other students asked the teacher. The teacher confirmed this volunteer assistance increased during the fourth grade year. Student C also felt this support would continue if he or she had the same classmates in fifth grade.

Social. In regard to Student C’s social experiences, several themes emerged. This student maintained adaptive teacher-related and peer-related social behaviors and interactions. In addition, Student C displayed a quiet nature, was well-mannered, and was comfortable interacting with his or her teacher and other adults. The Social Competence Checklist noted several adaptive teacher-related social behaviors. Student C followed rules and directions, listened to the teacher, and finished his or her class work. The Social Competence Checklist findings were confirmed by the classroom observation notes.

The teacher reported that Student C’s comfort level and social skills had improved in fourth grade. To illustrate how Student C’s comfort level had increased, the teacher cited conversations that occurred between the two of them when this student shared about his or her home life. Student C especially enjoyed when the teacher goofed-off. This student validated this by stating, “She’s been fun,” and “She jokes with us sometimes.” The parent also felt this student was friends with the teacher.

The Social Competence Checklist also noted the adaptive social behaviors that occurred between Student C and his or her peers. Student C affiliated with his or her

peers, and this student supported his or her peers. The observation notes conveyed a specific example of how Student C supported his or her peers. Student C voluntarily offered instructions to assist his or her peers during a transition time, which validated the teacher's comment that Student C is more comfortable around his or her classmates this year.

In regard to Student C's peer relationships, it appears he or she was more social in fourth grade than in third grade. For example, when Student C was asked to assist a new student, Student C willingly sat down and talked to the new student. In addition, the teacher stated she saw Student C talking to some other kids he or she did not talk to last year. The observation notes revealed that Student C verbally interacted and played with boys and girls and with student participants and non-participants.

When I asked Student C what he or she thought about having the same classmates for two consecutive years, this student said it was good to have the same classmates for two years. The parent confirmed Student C enjoyed being with the same classmates for two years and that this student viewed many of them as good friends. The teacher affirmed the positive relationship that existed between Student C and his or her classmates by stating, "Everybody likes Student C." The observation notes confirmed that Student C's classmates like him or her, and the notes also revealed Student C's peers were willing to do whatever to help Student C. This assistance was welcomed by Student C. This student stated, "They help me with stuff like reading and spelling." Student C thought the idea of having this support next year would be good.

The IEP, the teacher interview, and the observation notes described Student C as quiet, shy, gentle, and timid, at times. Student C often did his or her own thing, especially during physical education class and recess. The teacher described this student

as sometimes withdrawn. She felt this student stayed away from those who were boastful, wished to avoid the lime-light, and did not want to get too close to anybody.

While Student C avoided getting too close to others, the IEP described him or her as polite and well mannered. The observation notes confirmed the IEP's description. Student C often raised his or her hand to ask for help, waited his or her turn during group activities, and answered only when asked to speak. Last, Student C was comfortable speaking to his or her classroom teacher and to other adults. This student freely spoke to the librarian and to me, and he or she often asked me questions. For example, Student C asked me how long I would be with his or her class today and about what I do for a job.

Emotional. Several themes associated with the emotional experiences of Student C emerged in the parent questionnaire, the teacher and student interviews, and the observation notes. These themes included this student's thoughts and feelings about staying with the same teacher and classmates for two consecutive years, this student's level of confidence in his or her academic abilities, and his or her feelings about going to fifth grade. Student C felt good about having the same teacher for two years and enjoyed having the same classmates for two years. This student liked most of his or her classmates and felt his or her friends would be helpful next year, as they were in fourth grade. Student C felt comfortable with the teacher and his or her classmates as he or she often smiled and laughed.

In regard to Student C's academic accomplishments, this student was proud. The teacher stated, "Student C's self-confidence had been boosted." She asserted new experiences will not intimidate Student C. Yet, this student said he or she was nervous about going to fifth grade and about having a new teacher next year.

Student D - Academic. In relation to Student D's academic performance, several

themes were found. This student made little improvement in reading, but made significant improvement in math. He or she was below grade level in reading and at grade level in math at the end of his or her fourth grade year. Student D required accommodations for both reading and math, tried hard in school, participated in class, and often received reading support from classmates.

Student D’s reading performance revealed a strong theme in that he or she was below grade level in reading. The STAR assessment grade equivalent scores in Table 4.4 noted a slight improvement in Student D’s reading from third grade to fourth grade. However, Student D’s reading ability was still below grade level. This was further confirmed in Student D’s IEP and the teacher interview. On another reading assessment, Student D remained in the 0-9th percentile throughout the fourth grade year, reported the teacher. Furthermore, during both third and fourth grade, this student was reading at a pre-primer or primer level. Student D recognized this by stating their reading ability was the same as last year.

Table 4.4

STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student D

Student D	3rd-grade	4th-grade	Change
Reading	1	1.4	0.4
Math	2.6	4.3	1.7

Note. The grade equivalent score is a norm-referenced score ranging from 0.0 to 12.9+. It represents how a student’s test performance compares with that of other students nationally.

During the classroom observations, passages, word lists, test questions, and test answers were all read to Student D. The teacher noted there was no improvement in test results if this student read the material; conversely, if someone read the material to

Student D, he or she comprehended the material and answered the questions. The observation notes confirmed Student D's ability to successfully answer verbal questions correctly. Often, student D requested that items be reread, or he or she asked the teacher to wait before moving to the next question.

The classroom observations noted Student D looked around the room as passages were read. He or she listened, but did not follow along. When asked by a teacher to read a passage, this student read aloud, but he or she missed 15-20 words. In addition, as Student D completed worksheet assignments, he or she either sat near the teacher's desk or went back and forth from his or her own desk to the teacher's desk in order to have items read aloud. When the teacher was unable to read items to Student D, this student asked, "Can somebody read to me?" This was permitted on non-graded exercises.

Moreover, Student D struggled with writing and spelling, as was revealed in the IEP, the teacher interview notes, and the observation notes. The spelling tests were differentiated. This student said, "I like how she gives out spelling tests." The teacher gave multiple-choice spelling tests and spelled aloud every option. During his or her writing activities, Student D's teacher reported that the Special Education teacher spelled every word for Student D.

As noted in Table 4.4, Student D made noticeable improvements in math from third grade to fourth grade. He or she performed at grade level. The teacher stated that Student D's math achievement had improved from the 40th percentile in the fall to the 70th percentile in the spring. Student D's IEP noted this student's greatest strength was in math, and Student D did well in math as long as everything was read to him or her. The observation notes stated that Student D independently completed a multiplication chart. Student D recognized their progress in math, and the parent confirmed this student had

learned a lot about math.

The teacher interview and the observation notes revealed that Student D tried hard at his or her school work. This student participated in class by raising his or her hand to answer questions and by making comments during class discussions. The teacher stated this occurred during reading and math instruction. The observation notes revealed that although Student D often turned in his or her work last, he or she did finish the class assignments.

Social. In relation to Student D's social experiences, several themes were found. This student maintained adaptive teacher-related and peer-related social behaviors and interactions. Moreover, he or she was well-mannered and was comfortable interacting with his or her teacher and other adults. The Social Competence Checklist noted several adaptive teacher-related social behaviors. Student D complied promptly, followed rules and directions, listened to the teacher, and finished his or her class work. These were further supported by the observation notes. The parent stated Student D liked the chance he or she had to get to know the teacher better, and this student liked his or her teacher very much.

The Social Competence Checklist noted Student D's affiliation with his or her peers. When compared to third grade, the teacher stated Student D was more social this year. Observations during the school day revealed Student D verbally interacted and played with boys and girls and student participants and non-participants. Student D said it was a good thing to have the same classmates for two years. Student D also shared, "It's sorta fun because in third grade you made friends and then in fourth grade you get to hang out with them." When asked how Student D felt about going into the fifth grade and his or her friends, this student stated, "I kinda wish I had the same ones."

The parent acknowledged the benefits Student D received as a result of having the same classmates for two years. She stated Student D already knew his or her friends, he or she didn't have to make new friends, and he or she had no problems with classmates. Furthermore, Student D's friends supported him or her in reading. Some of the classmates asked, "Do you want me to help Student D?" The teacher reported this student knew which classmates he or she could look to for help. In addition, a weaker theme associated with peer-related social behaviors arose. Student D defended himself or herself when other students acted inappropriately toward him or her. Student D said, "stop it" or "shut-up."

The IEP, the teacher interview, and the observation notes revealed that Student D was well behaved and respectful. For example, this student often said, "Yes ma'am" and "No ma'am," or "Sorry" when he or she had done something wrong. The teacher stated this behavior was consistent over the last two years. Student D received a sticker for good behavior at the end of most days.

Besides his or her respectful interactions with the teacher, Student D also was respectful toward other adults. For example, this student said "hello" to me and frequently asked me questions. Leaving the lunch room one day, Student D placed his arm on my shoulder as we walked to the classroom. Student D also approached another teacher in the hallway and asked for a hug.

Emotional. In regard to Student D's emotional experiences, several themes were found. These themes included Student D's thoughts and feelings about academics, about his or her teacher and peer relationships, and about his or her own behavior.

Student D's parent stated this student felt smart. The observation notes and my interview with this student revealed Student D enjoyed math and was thrilled when he or

she learned his or her assessment score in math was above the national average. The teacher felt Student D had become confident in his or her math abilities. Yet, Student D's face reflected disappointment when he or she received a bad grade.

In relation to Student D's peer relationships, the parent reported Student D felt well-liked by his or her peers. The observation notes and the interview with this student revealed Student D was comfortable with his or her classmates and welcomed their assistance with reading. This student reported having good feelings about having the same classmates for two years. Student D smiled and laughed as he or she interacted with his or her peers. On the other hand, Student D was able to express negative feelings of annoyance and anger when other students acted inappropriately toward him or her.

Although Student D had a learning disability, the teacher reported that this student was comfortable with himself or herself this year. Also, Student D was comfortable with the teacher and her expectations and with receiving frequent reading assistance from her. This student confirmed his or her comfort by stating, "It's sorta fun having the same teacher for two years."

A weaker theme arose regarding Student D's thoughts about his or her behavior. The teacher reported that when she asked this student if he or she should receive a sticker for good behavior for the day, Student D said "no" even when he or she had done nothing wrong. On occasion, Student D approached the teacher and informed her when he or she had done something wrong, for example, when this student forgot to turn in a paper.

Student E - Academic. In regard to Student E's academic performance, several themes were identified. Student E made little improvement in reading, but made significant improvement in math. Student E was eager to learn, displayed poor study skills, was verbally expressive, and benefited from being with the same teacher for two

years.

As shown in Table 4.5., the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores revealed a one letter grade drop in reading from third grade to fourth grade. On another reading assessment, the teacher reported that Student E increased by two months. Yet, Student E's reading ability was still below grade level on both assessments. This was further confirmed in this student's IEP, which stated Student E needed help in reading, spelling, phonics, fluency strategies, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and written expression. Student E acknowledged his or her reading difficulties by stating his or her reading ability was probably about the same as last year, while Student E's parent agreed he or she struggled with reading and spelling.

Table 4.5

STAR Reading and Math Grade Equivalent Scores: Student E

Student E	3rd-grade	4th-grade	Change
Reading	4.7	3.7	-1
Math	3.6	6.7	3.1

Note. The grade equivalent score is a norm-referenced score ranging from 0.0 to 12.9+. It represents how a student's test performance compares with that of other students nationally.

Student E had an accommodation for reading which allowed any material to be read aloud to him or her on an as needed basis. The teacher reported Student E rarely asked for this accommodation, but if the material was read to him or her, then this student was capable of completing any assignment. The classroom observations noted Student E sat near the teacher and listened closely as she read aloud questions and answers on worksheets and tests to other students with learning disabilities. During another learning activity, Student E followed along while the history teacher read a passage aloud, and he

or she eventually volunteered to read aloud in class. In addition, Student E read Accelerated Reader books independently and voluntarily took quizzes on the books he or she read.

Student E was gifted in math. As noted in Table 4.5., the STAR assessment grade equivalent scores revealed a three grade increase in math from third grade to fourth grade. This academic strength and improvement was verified in this student's IEP, the teacher and student interviews, and the parent questionnaire. Within the classroom, Student E frequently raised his or her hand to answer math questions and usually gave correct answers.

Student E's IEP stated, and the teacher agreed, this student was a bright student who was eager to learn and enjoyed being challenged. Student E confirmed his or her desire to be challenged in the classroom as he or she stated how he or she liked the brain teasers and scribble sheets the teacher gave the students to complete. In addition to Student E's desire to work on challenging assignments, this student also raised his or her hand to answer language arts and math questions, and he or she helped a classmate who was struggling with a problem. Despite Student E's desire to learn and help others, he or she had poor study habits. Student E's parent stated that he or she got in a hurry sometimes. The classroom observation notes confirmed Student E's tendency to hurry as he or she impetuously blurted out answers and quickly finished worksheets.

Further, the classroom observation notes revealed Student E displayed the following behaviors: (a) looking around the classroom during directed instruction, (b) working on other things besides the class assignments, (c) misplacing class work, and (d) not completing class work on time. In addition, Student E often made inappropriate verbal comments aloud in class. For example, when the teacher gave out a new

assignment, Student E said, “No.”

The parent stated Student E benefited from having the same teacher for two consecutive years. The parent stressed that having the same teacher provided Student E with more one-on-one learning, which allowed him or her to understand the class assignments better. Student E’s parent further concluded that this student’s achievement gains were a result of having the same teacher for two consecutive years. Student E confirmed the parent’s aforementioned statement as he or she stated, “It was good to have the same teacher, because I didn’t have to get used to a different teacher.”

Social. In relation to Student E’s social experiences, several themes were revealed. Student E displayed adaptive and maladaptive teacher-related and student-related behaviors and interactions, engaged in appropriate and inappropriate classroom behaviors, and interacted with adults other than the teacher. The Social Competence Checklist and the observation notes revealed a couple of adaptive teacher-related social behaviors. Student E complied promptly to requests and followed directions. For example, when he or she was asked to remove his or her hat in class and to sit on a bench for five-minutes during recess and physical education, Student E obeyed without complaining. Student E also made efforts to talk to the teacher as evidenced by Student E’s willingness to approach the teacher at her desk to talk about events unrelated to school. The parent agreed that Student E held a good relationship with his or her teacher as this student trusted the teacher and had bonded with her.

Maladaptive teacher-related social behaviors were also noted in the Social Competence Checklist and the observation notes. Student E defied the teacher by ignoring her or challenging her instructions. For example, when asked to stop an inappropriate behavior in gym class, this student engaged in the behavior one more time

before he or she stopped. Additional observations noted Student E got into trouble with the teacher at various times throughout the day. These negative behaviors included the following: (a) this student was asked to remove paperwork from his or her desk unrelated to the current lesson, (b) instructed to take his or her seat several times, (c) sent to time-out twice, (d) asked to stop a dangerous behavior, (e) requested to wait his or her turn, and (f) told to be quiet often.

The Social Competence Checklist and the observation notes highlighted several adaptive peer-related social behaviors. Student E affiliated with his or her peers. For example, this student talked and played with boys and girls and student participants and non-participants. The parent confirmed Student E developed more social skills as a result of being with the same classmates for two consecutive years. Likewise, the teacher reported Student E was more comfortable with his or her classmates in fourth grade. Student E concurred with the teacher's statement as he or she said, "I already had all my friends," and "I was used to all my friends." This student also said, "If some of them stay back behind, I would miss some of them."

Maladaptive peer-related social behaviors also were exposed in the Social Competence Checklist and the observation notes. Student E displayed aggressive behaviors. For example, Student E pushed a boy's arm away and made faces at a girl whom he or she did not want to sit nearby during lunch. The teacher interview, the parent questionnaire results, and the observation notes agreed that Student E had issues with bullying. It was confirmed that Student E was a little overbearing and did not always have positive relationships with his or her peers. The teacher stated, "They want what they want and doesn't give up until somebody gives in or tells them to back off and leave them alone."

Furthermore, the teacher stated that Student E was very talkative as evidenced by the fact that he or she talked to anybody about anything. However, the Social Competence Checklist and the observations noted Student E displayed disruptive verbal behaviors. Examples of Student E's disruptive behavior included: (a) commenting aloud in class without being called on by the teacher, (b) talking aloud fast, (c) blurting out, "I've had mine finished," and (d) answering questions before the teacher would get the questions finished.

In contrast, Student E demonstrated appropriate classroom behaviors. For example, this student politely asked to use the computer, raised his or her hand to participate in math class, interacted with quiet students, and received enough stickers for good behavior in order to choose from the prize box. When Student E did not receive a sticker for good behavior, Student E agreed he or she did not earn it.

Of particular concern in regard to Student E's behavior were his or her inappropriate behaviors during transition times. For example, while standing in line in the hallway, this student spun an art piece on the wall round and round. According to the teacher, at the beginning of the school year, it was important that Student E know the limits and expectations, along with the consequences for not meeting those expectations. Student E was cognizant of these expectations at the start of his or her second consecutive year with the teacher, which got this student off on the right track, stated the teacher.

Last, Student E interacted with adults other than the teacher. For example, this student made comments toward me and often asked me questions, such as, "Why are you making notes," and "Are you the FBI?" Student E also approached teachers from other classrooms to talk about events unrelated to school and to ask for hugs.

Emotional. A couple of themes related to the emotional experiences of Student E were identified. These included his or her thoughts and feelings toward academics and the relationships with his or her teacher and classmates. The parent reported Student E was more confident toward academics after remaining with the same teacher for two consecutive years. This was substantiated by the observation notes, which revealed Student E was proud of his or her grades. This student's IEP stated Student E displayed an eagerness and enjoyment towards learning. This student thought some assignments were fun and said he or she liked math.

Often, Student E laughed as he or she interacted with the teacher and his or her classmates. Student E said, "I liked having the same classmates for two years because I already had all my friends." Student E also said, "I was pretty happy," when Student E learned he or she would have the same teacher for a second year.

Tier Two

The second tier noted the academic, social, and emotional themes among the five students with learning disabilities who looped. Themes recognized among three or more of the students were documented as strong themes. Common themes for two students were listed as weak themes (Ary et al., 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Strong academic themes. Progress in reading from third grade to fourth grade was acquired by Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E. Although progress in reading was accomplished by all five students with learning disabilities, Student A, Student C, Student D, and Student E, were still below grade level in reading at the end of the fourth grade year. Additionally, in language arts, Student C, Student D, and Student E, struggled with spelling. Student C, Student D, and Student E received frequent read aloud support from the teacher. From third grade to fourth grade, all five

students with learning disabilities showed improvement in math.

Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D gave their best effort in their class assignments. Yet, these same four students with learning disabilities did not volunteer to read aloud in class. Along with Student E, these four students often participated in class by raising their hand. This was noted during language arts, math, and Virginia studies' sessions.

Student A, Student B, and Student D took risks of being wrong. They raised their hands to answer questions and often their answers were not correct. All five students with learning disabilities finished their class assignments. However, Student E often was distracted or worked on activities other than the assigned exercises.

Weak academic themes. Student C and Student D received reading support from their classmates. Both the students and the teacher thought this support was good. Students D and E struggled specifically with writing. Also, they often looked around the classroom as passages were read aloud. Although progress was made in math by all five students with learning disabilities, Students A and C were still below grade level in math at the end of the fourth grade year. Student D and Student E liked math and did well in math. Additionally, Students C and E rushed through their class work, while Students A and B worked independently on their assignments.

Strong social themes. The strong social themes fell under three different sub-categories: (a) Adaptive-teacher related, (b) Adaptive-peer related, and (c) General. Negative or maladaptive social behaviors were documented for one of the five students; therefore, the negative and maladaptive behaviors were not common enough to be coded as themes among the students.

Adaptive-teacher related. Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D

followed directions, finished their class work, followed rules, and listened to the teacher. Students A, B, D, and E complied with the teacher. Yet, it was noted Student E typically complied after the teacher made two or more requests. All five students were comfortable with the teacher; they frequently spoke to the teacher about topics related to their personal lives. Last, Students A, C, and E were friendly toward the teacher.

Adaptive-peer related. Students A, B, C, D, and E were comfortable with their peers and affiliated with their peers. This affiliation involved verbal interactions with boys and girls and with participant and non-participant students. Also, the five students played with their classmates during physical education class and recess. However, it was noted Student 'B' was often comfortable playing alone.

Student A, Student C, and Student D were given reading assistance by their classmates. This assistance was either voluntary or given when the teacher requested that they help. Students A, B, and D cooperated with their peers. Lastly, all five students liked having the same classmates for two years, but only Students A, C, D, and E stated it would be good to have the same classmates in fifth grade.

General. Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E were more socially interactive in fourth grade compared to third grade. Also, the five students were rewarded for consistently good behavior throughout the day. However, Student E was rewarded less often as the other four students. Students A, B, C, D, and E were comfortable speaking to me; yet, only Students A, C, D, and E were comfortable speaking to and interacting with adults other than me and their classroom teacher.

Weak social themes. Students A and B worked independently on class assignments. Students B and C supported their peers. Student C and Student D accepted

help from classmates well; this help consisted of reading assistance with assigned worksheets. Also, these two students were polite and well-mannered.

Strong emotional themes. Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E were more self-confident in fourth grade compared to third grade. Students A, B, C, D, and E were comfortable with their teacher and their classmates, liked having the same teacher and classmates for two consecutive years, and smiled and laughed frequently.

Weak emotional themes. Student A and C would like to have the same classmates next year as these classmates would be available to help them with reading. Students D and E liked math. Students A and C will be able to approach new situations with more confidence, and Students A and B were excited about having a new teacher in fifth grade.

The information presented above noted the following general results: (a) academically, the five student participants improved in reading, but were still below grade level with the exception of one student; (b) improvement was also made in math by the five participants, but two students were still below grade level; (c) socially, the five students displayed adaptive teacher-related and peer-related social behaviors, and they were also comfortable interacting with adults other than their teacher; and (d) emotionally, the five students were comfortable with and liked their teacher and classmates, showed improvement in their self-confidence, and often smiled and laughed. Chapter five will provide a more detailed summary and discussion of these results.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The problem is the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities are not being met within the general classroom. Research shows students with disabilities face numerous academic, social, and emotional challenges during their educational journey (Bowen, 1998; Bursuck, 1989; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997). Due to recent governmental mandates (USDOE, 2004) and the standards of InTASC (2010), teachers of the general classroom are responsible for meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities. Looping, where a teacher moves with his or her class to the next grade, has been suggested as an educational approach to assist in meeting the needs of these students (Gaustad, 1998; Kenney, 2007; Newberg, 1995). The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to determine if looping provides solutions for meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, most of the current research on looping was anecdotal or editorial in nature. In addition, the majority of empirically-based research discussed the experiences of looping for students without disabilities and presented only the perspectives of the teachers; a scarce amount revealed the viewpoints of the parents and the students. Further, few studies examined and stated the results about the impact of looping on exceptional students in general. Therefore, this phenomenological case study sought to fill a gap in current research by describing the experiences of students with learning disabilities who participated in a looped classroom via a sound, qualitative analysis.

This phenomenological case study examined the academic, social, and emotional

experiences of students with learning disabilities who looped from third to fourth grade. The research was carried out in the natural setting of an elementary school with a purposive sample of participants. The participants included the teacher who looped, the five students with learning disabilities, and their parents. At the time of this study, the five student participants who looped had IEPs. One boy was identified as having reading, math, and speech learning disabilities. Two boys had a reading disability and one boy and one girl had a speech disability. Data was collected through qualitative methodologies at the conclusion of the students' fourth grade year. The forms of data collection included: (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, (c) examination of student artifacts, and (d) observations.

Review of the Methodology

The goal of this phenomenological case study was to examine the academic, social, and emotional experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities. Descriptive details were gathered through a parent questionnaire, teacher and student interviews, examination of the students' IEPs and STAR reading and math scores, and observations during normal school activities.

The information collected was coded and placed into matrices listing the pre-established categories of academic, social, and emotional experiences. The three categories within each matrix were analyzed to find specific themes in regard to the individual student participants who looped from third grade to fourth grade. Words, phrases, patterns, and educational practices, which appeared in a minimum of three of the data collection methods, were considered strong themes; these themes completed tier one of this qualitative inquiry.

Themes highlighted for the individual students and the categories within each

matrix were further examined to identify common academic, social, and emotional themes among the five students who looped from third grade to fourth grade. Themes shared by a minimum of three students were labeled as strong themes. Themes noted for two of the students were listed as weak themes (Ary et al., 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The strong and weak themes applicable among the five student participants who looped completed tier two of this phenomenological case study.

Summary of the Results

Themes for the individual students.

Student A. Student A's overall academic achievement improved from third grade to fourth grade. Progress was made in reading and math, but this student was still below grade level in reading and math at the end of the fourth grade year. This did not agree with the findings of Elliott and Capp (2003) who stated special education students who looped were working at grade level by the end of the second year. Also, Student A frequently attempted to answer questions in class, even if the answers were incorrect. This demonstrated that Student A was not afraid to take chances and supported the notions presented by Kenney (2007) and McClellan (1995) that students with disabilities who participated in a looped classroom were willing to take more risks and to speak up in class.

Student A displayed adaptive teacher-related, adaptive peer-related, and several general social behaviors. The adaptive teacher-related social behaviors consisted of following rules and directions, listening to the teacher, finishing class work, working independently, complying with the teacher, being comfortable with the teacher, and exhibiting friendly behaviors toward the teacher. The adaptive student-related social behaviors involved being friendly with and affiliating with his or her peers, verbally

interacting and playing with boys and girls as well as with student participants and non-participants, and being comfortable with his or her classmates. The aforementioned positive student-teacher and student-student relationships confirmed the reports in current literature (Geiger, 2000; O'Neil, 2004; Rodriquez & Arenz, 2007). Further, Student A's interaction with students without disabilities contradicted the finding by Estell et al. (2009) who stated that students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities.

Although Student A was quiet, he or she appeared comfortable talking to me and other adults. Also, Student A laughed often. This cheerful disposition supported Black's 2000 conclusion that children who looped were more cheerful.

Student B. Student B's overall academic achievement improved from third grade to fourth grade. Student B was above grade level in reading and math at the end of the fourth grade year. Student B tried hard in school and gave his or her best on class assignments. Despite his or her speech disability, this student raised his or her hand often in class to answer questions. This confirmed Kenney's (2007) finding that looping with the same teacher and classmates allows students with disabilities to feel more secure and more willing to speak up. Also, Student B's articulation and pronunciation skills improved. Yet, speech therapy would still be required for him or her during the fifth grade year.

Student B displayed adaptive teacher-related, adaptive peer-related, and several general social behaviors. The adaptive teacher-related social behaviors comprised of working independently, finishing his or her class work, and following rules and directions. Student B was more comfortable with the teacher in fourth grade and held a good relationship with her. The positive student-teacher relationship between Student B

and the teacher corresponded with Rodriguez and Arenz's (2007) study. The authors concluded that student-teacher relationships for a looped classroom resulted in several positive trends and was valued by the students.

The adaptive student-related social behaviors for Student B involved cooperating with peers, supporting peers, and affiliating with his or her peers, verbally interacting with boys and girls and with student participants and non-participants, but playing mostly with boys. Student B's interaction with students without disabilities contradicted the finding by Estell et al. (2009) who stated that students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities.

Student B also talked more in fourth grade and liked having the same classmates for a second year. Although this student was most often quiet and gentle, he or she was comfortable interacting with me. The report given in the article "Multi-year Assignment" (1998) and the findings by O'Neil (2004) were supported by the above mentioned positive student-to-student behaviors exhibited by Student B.

Emotionally, Student B felt comfortable with his or her teacher and classmates. This student liked having the same teacher and classmates for two consecutive years and felt his or her classmates liked him or her. George and Lounsbury (2002) and Pecanic (2003) stated that students who loop gain a more positive viewpoint of their friends' feelings toward them. The authors' findings, along with this study's results, underscore the importance of a student having the same classmates for two consecutive years.

Although quiet, Student B smiled frequently displaying a cheerful disposition. Again, Black's 2000 report that students who looped were more cheerful was further substantiated. On the other hand, the teacher stated there was no change in Student B's self-confidence from third grade to fourth grade. This finding contradicts Chirichello and

Chirichello (2001) who found that a shy student in their study was more self-confident after participating in a looped classroom.

Student C. Student C did not make significant academic improvement from third grade to fourth grade. Student C was below grade level in reading and math at the end of the fourth grade year. This student's academic performance did not support Hitz et al. (2007) and Elliott and Capp's (2003) findings. The authors stated looping allowed slower students or students with disabilities the opportunity to improve and be at grade level by the end of the second year. Student C also received frequent read-aloud accommodations in both reading and math. This student requested this assistance from the teacher and from his or her peers.

Student C often raised his or her hand to answer questions during language arts and math directed instruction, which indicated Student C was not afraid to take chances of being wrong. Kenney (2007) and McClellan (1995) also found that students who loop are often not afraid to take risks. Further, Student C was eager to learn and worked hard at his or her class assignments. Yet, Student C at times rushed through class exercises. In addition, Student C received frequent reading support from his or her classmates. This support agreed with the report by Forsten et al. (1997). The authors stated that students in a looped classroom are more willing to assist their friends with disabilities.

Student C displayed adaptive teacher-related, adaptive peer-related, and several general social behaviors. The adaptive teacher-related social behaviors consisted of following rules and directions, listening to the teacher, and finishing his or her class work. This student had a comfortable and friendly relationship with the teacher. Conversations frequently covered topics unrelated to school. These results confirmed the

idea presented by Kenney (2007) and Rodriguez and Arenz (2007). These authors stated looping creates positive relationships between teachers and students.

The adaptive student-related social behaviors included affiliating with peers, verbally interacting with and playing with boys and girls and with student participants and non-participants, and supporting his or her peers. Student C's interaction with students without disabilities contradicted the finding by Estell et al. (2009) who stated that students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities.

Student C was well liked by his or her peers, was comfortable with his or her peers, liked having the same classmates for two consecutive years, and thought it would be a good idea to have the same classmates in fifth grade. The report by Kenney (2007) on how looping lends to positive peer relationships was confirmed by these findings on Student C's peer relationships. Also, Student C often received support from his or her peers and accepted this assistance willingly, which further substantiated the work by Forsten et al. (1997) and O'Neil (2004).

Student C was quiet, timid, and gentle. In addition, this student was withdrawn at times, but was comfortable doing things that were different from what his or her peers were doing. Student C was always polite and well-mannered and was comfortable interacting with me and other adults.

Student D. Academically, Student D was well below grade level in reading at the end of the third grade and fourth grade years. The report by Hitz et al. (2007) and the findings by Elliott and Capp (2003) gave contradictory results. The authors stated looping allowed slower students or students with disabilities the opportunity to improve and be at grade level by the end of the second year. Student D had frequent read-aloud

accommodations for reading, and he or she requested this assistance from the teacher and from his or her peers. Moreover, Student D struggled with spelling and writing.

This student made significant progress in math. In third grade, Student D was below grade level in math, but in fourth grade he or she did reach grade level during the fourth grade. Student D's improvement in math did, however, support McCown and Sherman's 2002 conclusion that students with disabilities who loop are working at grade level by the end of the second year. In addition, Student D also gave his or her best effort on his or her class assignments, and Student D often participated in class discussions during both reading and math directed instruction.

Student D displayed adaptive teacher-related, adaptive peer-related, and several general social behaviors. The adaptive teacher-related social behaviors involved following rules and directions, listening to and complying with the teacher, and finishing class work. This student and the teacher held a comfortable, positive relationship. Similar to Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992) and Rodriguez and Arenz (2007) studies, this study identified the positive impact looping has on student-teacher interactions.

The adaptive student-related social behaviors included verbally interacting and playing with boys and girls and with student participants and non-participants. Student D's interaction with students without disabilities contradicted the finding by Estell et al. (2009) who stated that students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities. Student D was comfortable with his or her peers, received support from his or her peers, liked having the same classmates for two years, and wished he or she could have the same classmates in fifth grade. George and Lounsbury (2002) and Pecanic (2003) both discovered similar results on how looping positively affects students' relationships with their peers.

Student D was mannerly and respectful toward the teacher. Positive social behaviors were consistent. Also, this student was comfortable interacting with me and other adults. Emotionally, Student D had improved in his or her confidence toward math. The increase in Student D's confidence supported the findings by Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) who found looping supports a student's self-confidence. Also, Student D was comfortable with his or her classmates and felt well-liked. This student felt good about having the same teacher and classmates for two years. Also, this student displayed a pleasant disposition by laughing and smiling often, which confirmed the report by Black (2000) who found that looped students were cheerful.

Student E. In regard to academics, Student E was bright, eager to learn, and enjoyed being challenged. This student made no progress in reading from third grade to fourth grade. Student E was still below grade level in reading at the end of fourth grade. Hitz et al. (2007) and Elliott and Capp (2003) found that slower students or students with learning disabilities were performed at grade level after participating in a looped classroom. The authors' findings contradicted the findings of this study. Student E also received frequent read-aloud assistance from the teacher. This student appeared to enjoy reading as he or she volunteered to read aloud in class, and he or she read Accelerated Reading books on his or her own.

In math, Student E was at grade level in third-grade, yet he or she improved significantly in math from third grade to fourth grade. In addition, this student was eager to answer math questions in class, and he or she often blurted out answers without being called upon by the teacher. Despite his or her impetuosity, distractibility, and carelessness, Student E improved in his or her study skills from third grade to fourth grade. This student appeared to more clearly understand the teacher's expectations and

assumed more responsibility for his or her learning.

Student E displayed adaptive and maladaptive teacher-related social behaviors, adaptive and maladaptive peer-related social behaviors, and other general social behaviors. The adaptive teacher-related social behaviors involved complying with the teacher, bonding with the teacher, and trusting the teacher. This student also talked frequently to the teacher about topics unrelated to school. The positive student-teacher relationship between Student E and the teacher supported the work by Rodriguez and Arenz (2007).

The maladaptive teacher-related social behaviors included defying the teacher and getting into trouble with the teacher through various negative behaviors. Gagnolti (2006) stated classroom management problems can still be a problem during the second year of a looped cycle. Therefore, Student E's maladaptive behaviors substantiated the findings by these authors.

Student E exhibited adaptive peer-related social behaviors. This student affiliated with his or her peers by verbally interacting and playing with boys and girls and with student participants and non-participants. Student E's interaction with students without disabilities contradicted the finding by Estell et al. (2009) who stated that students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities. Student E was comfortable his or her classmates and liked having them for two years. Similar to Kenney (2007) and Rodriguez and Arenz (2007) findings, this study found that looping offers students opportunities to form positive peer relationships.

Student E also displayed a maladaptive peer-related social behavior, aggressiveness. This aggressive behavior included physical actions and verbal comments. These negative interactions with his or her peers possibly supported the

statements given by Simel (1998). The author noted over-familiarity between the teacher and students in a looped classroom can lead to behavior problems from the students. Although Student E could be aggressive, he or she was comfortable approaching and interacting with me and other adults.

Emotionally, Student E was more confident in his or her academic abilities. However, this confidence, at times, came across as being prideful. This student liked having the same teacher for two years; he or she felt he or she understood the teacher better, which supported the report by Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992). The authors stated looping allows the students to be comfortable with the teacher's style of teaching and his or her expectations. Student E also liked having the same classmates for two years as he or she did not have to make new friends. Similar to Student E's remarks, the students in Pecanic's 2003 study enjoyed not having to make new friends. Additionally, this student frequently smiled and laughed often, which supported Black (2000) who concluded that looped students are cheerful.

Themes among the students. As I analyzed the data for the five students with learning disabilities who looped from third grade to fourth grade, numerous common themes were identified among the students with learning disabilities. A theme was labeled as strong if it applied to at least three of the five student participants who looped (Ary et al., 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A theme was considered weak if it applied to any two of the five student participants who looped.

Academic themes. Academically, the five student participants who looped improved in reading, but were still below grade level, with the exception of one student. Improvement also was made in math by the five participants, but two students were still below grade level. The students participated in class and finished their class assignments.

The student participants gave their best effort at their school work, but would not volunteer to read aloud in class. Further, the students often attempted to answer questions even if the answers were incorrect. These attempts note the students were not afraid to take risks of being wrong. In addition, the three students with a reading disability received frequent read-aloud support from the teacher, and they struggled with spelling.

Weak academic themes included the following: (a) the students rushed through their assignments, (b) they worked independently of both their classmates and their teacher, (c) they struggled with writing, (d) they received reading support from their classmates, (e) they thought this support was good, (f) they looked around the room as passages were read, and (g) they stated they liked math.

Social themes. Socially, the five students with learning disabilities who looped displayed adaptive teacher-related, peer-related, and several general social behaviors. The strong adaptive teacher-related social themes included following rules and directions, finishing their class work, complying with the teacher, and listening to the teacher in class. Additionally, the students were friendly with the teacher and were comfortable sharing topics of a personal nature with the teacher. They liked that the teacher knew them well.

Strong adaptive peer-related social themes consisted of affiliating and cooperating with their peers, verbally interacting and playing with boys and girls and with participant and non-participant students. The students' interaction with students without disabilities contradicted the finding by Estell et al. (2009) who stated that students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities.

The students also liked having the same classmates for two years, were

comfortable with their classmates, and received reading assistance from their classmates. This volunteer assistance from their classmates was similar to Forsten et al.'s 1997 findings. The authors stated the friends of students with special needs in a looped classroom are more willing to assist their peers, regardless of their disability.

In general, the students were often rewarded for good behavior, were more social in fourth grade than in third grade, were comfortable interacting with me and other adults, and stated it would be good to have the same classmates in fifth grade. Weaker social themes involved working independently from peers, displaying a quiet nature, supporting their peers, accepting help from their classmates, and exhibiting polite manners.

Emotional themes. Emotionally, the five students who looped were comfortable with and liked having the same teacher for two consecutive years. Likewise, the student participants were comfortable with their peers and liked having the same classmates for two consecutive years. These students showed improvement in their self-confidence from third grade to fourth grade, and they often smiled and laughed. Weaker emotional themes consisted of the following: (a) thinking it would be a good idea if in the fifth grade they would have the same classmates to help them with reading, (b) feeling excited about having a new teacher next year, and (c) thinking new situations will not be so scary in the future.

Relationship of the Current Study to Previous Research

Certain themes derived from this current study confirmed several academic, social, and emotional findings from previous research. Additional themes from this study offered new insights contrary to the discoveries found in prior research studies. Furthermore, some ideas, although not strong enough to be considered as themes, concurred with previous research.

Academic themes in relation to previous research. Hitz et al. (2007) stated looping offered slower students the opportunity to improve in reading and eventually be at grade level during the second year. Similarly, Elliott and Capp's (2003) study stated that many special education students who looped were working at grade level by the end of the second year. The aforementioned studies were not supported by the findings of this case study. Although some improvement was made in academics overall by the student participants, four out of the five students were still below grade level in reading and two of the five students were still below grade level in math at the end of the second year. Additionally, this study's student participants were willing to participate in classroom discussions in regard to reading assignments, but most of the students did not volunteer to read aloud in class. Thus, Kenney's (2007) statement that students in a looped classroom were less anxious to read aloud in class was not substantiated.

Social themes in relation to previous research. Previous studies noted various social challenges for students with learning disabilities (Bowen, 1998; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Ring & Travers, 2005). However, when given the opportunity to remain with the same teacher and classmates for two years, many of these social difficulties were dispelled, according to this current study. In regard to students with learning disabilities, Ring and Taverns stated social inclusion is a greater challenge than meeting their curriculum needs. The results of this study discovered students with learning disabilities who participated in a looped classroom were accepted and supported by their non-disabled peers and affiliated equally as much with students with learning disabilities and students without learning disabilities. Also, this interaction disproved Bowen's notion that students with learning disabilities may not be socially ready for regular classroom placement.

Similarly, the studies conducted by Bursuck (1989) and Swanson and Malone (1992) indicated that students with learning disabilities were less accepted by their peers, had fewer friends, were rejected by their peers, and exhibited more negative behaviors. The results of this study contradicted all of these findings. The student participants of this study were not only accepted by their non-disabled peers, but they were also frequently supported by their peers. They held friendships with all of their classmates and demonstrated little to no maladaptive peer-related social behaviors. Further, Estell et al. (2009) discovered students with learning disabilities were more likely to have friends who also had learning disabilities. In this study, the students with learning disabilities held friendships with students who had learning disabilities and with students who did not have learning disabilities.

Gresham and MacMillan (1997) said students with disabilities encounter challenges in relating effectively with their teachers. Yet, in this study, the student participants who looped had a healthy relationship with their teacher. This study revealed that the students felt comfortable with her, were friendly with her, and often discussed with her about topics unrelated to school. In addition, the data primarily identified adaptive teacher-related social behaviors. There were very little negative interactions displayed between the teacher and the students with learning disabilities.

Ovalle (2004) and Pecanic (2003) stated that ending a long-term relationship with a teacher can create separation anxiety. This study's findings did not agree with the authors' findings. Although the students with disabilities of this study said it would be nice to have the same teacher again in fifth grade, they also stated they looked forward to having a new teacher next year. Moreover, the looped teacher felt the students who were the most insecure and withdrawn at the beginning of the third grade year had gained

enough self-confidence, so that facing a new classroom situation, including a new teacher, would not be intimidating. The teacher felt the students were ready to begin a new school year with a different teacher. Contradictory results were found by Kenney (2007) who stated the stress levels of the students increased when they thought about the upcoming year and who their teacher might be.

Ratzki (1988) concluded that remaining with the same teacher and classmates for more than one school year provides a community of caring. The social themes derived from this study confirmed this idea. Not only did the teacher offer consistent, substantial academic support, the classmates of the student participants offered academic support to the students with learning disabilities. Often the participants' classmates provided reading assistance. Forsten et al. (1997) stated in a looped classroom friends are more willing to assist their peers, regardless of their disability. Furthermore, Ovalle (2004) cited how classmates desire for their peers with disabilities to reach their potential.

Rudolph Steiner (Ogletree, 1974) believed having a teacher for more than one year allowed the teacher to form a deep connection with each student and to develop an in-depth understanding of each student's needs and interests. Bulau (2007) stated that keeping the same teacher and classmates together for two years increases the students' feelings of connectedness. The social experiences of this study's student participants stressed the connection the student participants experienced with their classmates and with their teacher. The students felt their teacher understood them and their classmates were there to support them. They said it was good to have the same classmates for two years and several wished they could be with them again in fifth grade. Feeling connected enabled them to feel secure. Ratzki (1988) described this as a natural outcome of looping. Thus, the sense of community was further enhanced.

The students with learning disabilities interacted with and played with participants and non-participants frequently throughout the school day. These social interactions confirmed Coben and Zigmond's 1996 study, which found that if non-learning disabled students had more opportunities to become acquainted with their learning disabled peers, then the social status problems of the students with learning disabilities would improve. The information collected on the social interactions of this present study revealed no social status problems for the student participants who looped.

Overall, the data collected in this study revealed very little disciplinary problems. The teacher-student and student-student interactions were healthy and positive during most school days. This supported the works by Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) and Black (2000) who concluded that looped classrooms have fewer disciplinary problems.

Moreover, the long-term, supportive relationships found in a looped classroom encourage thinking, risk-taking, and involvement (Kenney, 2007; McClellan, 1995; Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). Similarly, the philosophy upon which the Koln-Holweide, a German school, was built stated that relationships can affect academics (Ratzki, 1988). This study made similar conclusions. The students with learning disabilities found support, held a sense of connectedness and security with their teacher and classmates, frequently participated in class discussions, and volunteered to answer questions, even when their answers were not correct.

Emotional themes in relation to previous research. For students with learning disabilities, poor self-confidence is one particular area of weakness (Bowen, 1998). The results of this study suggest otherwise. The self-confidence of the students with learning disabilities who looped had improved from third grade to fourth grade. McClellan (1995) stated when students take risks and are received in a supportive atmosphere, their self-

confidence is increased. As a result of their increased self-confidence, students with learning disabilities are then more willing to take more risks, and the cycle continues. Both peer support and risk-taking were frequently found in this study. It is possible that these two factors, peer support and risk-taking, contributed to the improved self-confidence of these students with learning disabilities.

Not only do students with learning disabilities struggle with self-confidence, they also struggle with depression (Bowen, 1998). Although this study did not determine if the students with learning disabilities had depression, this study did find the students with learning disabilities often smiled and laughed. This was especially evident during their interactions with each other and with their non-disabled classmates. In addition, Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) stated shy students will come out of their shells, for they feel confident about themselves. This study confirmed this idea. Several of the students who were considered shy and withdrawn became more socially interactive during the second year. They talked frequently with their teacher and with their classmates, and they participated in class more.

The students who looped in this study were acutely aware of their abilities. They articulated both their academic strengths and weaknesses along with their social abilities and social status. During the two years with the same teacher and classmates, the students' self-awareness increased. Milson (2007) believed self-awareness played an important role in helping students with disabilities transition to new environments. According to the students and the teacher, the students with learning disabilities in this study were ready to transition to a new teacher. Perhaps their self-awareness had prepared them for this change.

Additional confirmations. Although not displayed enough to be considered

themes, several ideas and patterns of behavior are worth noting. The ideas and patterns of behavior either confirmed or contradicted findings documented in previous research. Furthermore, these ideas could result in future case study inquiries. The editorial piece by Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992) highlighted how a quiet and shy student's participation in a looped classroom resulted in the student gaining enough confidence to take on leadership roles. Similarly, one of this study's shyest students had gained enough security and social self-confidence that he or she was willing to guide and assist a new student.

Even though three of the five students had a speech disability and received weekly speech therapy, these students had frequent verbal interactions with their classmates. This finding was dissimilar to what Gualtieri et al. (1983) stated. The authors said a child's sense of competence in social situations were likely to rest squarely on the development of language. Further, the female participant with a speech disability in this study freely interacted with her peers. This contradicted the report by Benasich et al. (1993), which stated girls with expressive language impairments were significantly more socially withdrawn when compared with other non-disabled children.

Student E displayed the most maladaptive teacher and peer-related social behaviors. This student was noted for bullying behaviors and it was determined that this student was cognizant of whose buttons he or she could push and how far he or she could push them. These negative behaviors could possibly coincide with what Simel (1998) wrote. The author stated participating in a looped classroom creates over familiarity with the teacher and peers, which can invite behavior problems for students in the later elementary school grades. Student E could have become so familiar and comfortable with certain classmates, he or she found it easier to bully.

While the students with learning disabilities' socio-economic status was not clearly established in this study, four of the five participant students were on free or reduced lunch. Additionally, through conversations with the school principal and the classroom teacher, I discovered two of the five students were being raised by foster parents, and one student was living in a single-parent household. This parent worked two jobs to meet the family's basic needs, which meant there was little time to assist her children with their school work. Nichols and Nichols (2002) and Reynolds et al. (1999) stated children who find themselves in a fluctuating residence, family structure, or economic status can benefit from the looping classroom's stability and teacher continuity. Newberg's (1995) concept of "clusters" stressed that continuity at school provides the support some students lack at home and is especially beneficial to students with disabilities. Perhaps remaining with the same teacher and classmates for two consecutive years provided the consistency the students of this study needed to improve their social competence and to increase their self-confidence.

My Reflections

I gathered numerous insights through the examination of the general descriptive field notes, the observer comments in the observation notes, and the reflective notes. These notes were written before and after each day I collected data. I have listed these acquired insights below to possibly assist those who choose to conduct a future qualitative study on looping.

First, when pre-established categories have been set for a particular guiding question, a researcher should not limit one-self to only those categories. When the data analysis begins and additional categories arise, a researcher should not exclude these additional categories. For example, research question one of this study initially sought to

collect academic data from the students' IEPs. After the IEP information was examined, social and emotional categories also arose. Similarly, the observation notes were taken and evaluated to derive social categories only. When the observation notes were later studied, academic and social categories surfaced as well.

Because a researcher spends a significant amount of time studying and writing about the literature that pertains to his or her particular topic, when one goes into the field to conduct interviews or take observation notes, it is imperative that what has been read in the literature does not greatly influence what the researcher will ask, observe, or note. The ability to write down all that is said and done and to maintain objectivity is important. In order to maintain my objectivity, I chose to analyze the IEP and the interview data after all observations were completed. I wanted to maintain an unbiased approach while taking the observation notes. Further, I realized when a significant amount of time passed between the observations and the interviews or vice versa, what I asked or reported was not influenced by the information I had previously collected.

When a researcher plans to collect multiple years of students' IEPs, a researcher should clearly understand how often IEP meetings occur for that particular district. For example, for my study I originally planned to collect and compare the IEPs for the five participants who looped for two academic years; however, when I began collecting data at the end of the second year, I discovered only one IEP meeting had occurred over the last year for the students with learning disabilities. This meeting occurred either at the end of the third grade year or at the beginning of the fourth grade year. Therefore, I was only able to collect one IEP for each student.

At times, during phenomenological case study observations, participants will become comfortable with the researcher's presence. Consequently, participants and non-

participants may ask the researcher questions about why he or she is there or what he or she is doing. The researcher must be very careful in how these questions are answered. The researcher does not want to give too much information that will compromise the study's goal or make the study's participants nervous. I learned a vague or silly answer appeased elementary school students' curiosity.

An uneasy feeling about the researcher's presence could result in the participants' behaviors changing. These behaviors may be abnormal and they could skew the collected data. Also, as the researcher is interacting with the participants, it is important to include non-participants in the conversations. Including non-participants has two benefits. The participants will not think they have been singled out for any particular reason, and including non-participants allows the researcher to record information on the interactions between the participants and the non-participants.

Taking observation notes on more than one student in unstructured settings, such as in the cafeteria or on the playground, can be difficult. A solution to this challenge is to take notes on one participant at a time. If the researcher seeks to gather data on two or more students, the researcher will have to set aside several days for each student in order to take observation notes for each student. This will permit the researcher to collect information in a variety of settings.

Flexibility is a necessity when conducting a phenomenological case study in the public school system for two specific reasons. School principals are frequently out of their office as they are often attending to classroom issues or are in meetings on or off of the campus. As a result, when a researcher seeks to gather information from the principal, the researcher must be flexible as to when he or she can pick up this data. It may mean coming to the school after normal school hours. Also, when a meeting has

been scheduled to collect records from the principal, he or she may have been called out for an unexpected meeting. The researcher must be accommodating.

The second reason flexibility is necessary when carrying out a phenomenological case study in the public school system is that the teacher and students' schedules often change at the end of the school year. Field trips, standardized testing review sessions, standardized testing, field days, and award days are all events the researcher will have to work with or around at the end of the school year. Again, an adaptable schedule will benefit the researcher.

Finally, a researcher may consider carrying out a grounded theory study on the experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities. After collecting data using the methodologies noted in this study and forming categories, the researcher would look for underlying themes and relationships among the categories (Ary et al., 2006). These themes would offer tentative theoretical statements about the relationships. The researcher would then collect more data testing the adequacy of the theoretical constructs.

This abovementioned process would be repeated until the analysis no longer is able to contribute new information. This would permit the researcher to make a general theoretical statement that is well- grounded in the data. This study suggested a theory: Although students with learning disabilities may not reach grade level performance in a particular subject, the level of security they acquire through the consistent support of their classmates increases their acceptance of their disability, which in turn improves their level of self-acceptance and self-confidence. Repetitive data collection through a grounded theory study over a more extended period of time may validate this proposed theory.

Limitations

This phenomenological case study was limited in four specific areas. To begin, the demographics of the five participants were homogeneous. The five participants were solely of the Caucasian race and came from the mid-lower socioeconomic status. Although efforts were made to improve the transferability of the acquired results through the detailed descriptions of the data collection methods, the data analyses, the context, and the participants, the results may not be applicable to other racial and socioeconomic groups. Future inquiries on the experiences of looping for students with learning disabilities could seek to broaden the current research base by examining a group of students of a more diverse racial and socioeconomic make-up.

The Virginia studies teacher, the special education teacher, and the speech therapist that assisted the students with learning disabilities daily were initially asked to examine the themes derived for the five participant students who looped. These reviewers would have noted whether or not the themes were accurate. This peer review would have aided in the credibility of the data collected (Ary et al, 2006). However, I decided this effort to buttress the credibility of this study would violate the confidentiality promised to the teacher, the students, and their parents. Therefore, this peer review was not conducted. Future research on this topic may seek to design the data analyses in such a way where a peer review can be performed without breaching confidentiality.

Data collection occurred only at the end of the looped year. Data saturation was acquired through multiple data methodologies; the information gathered showed redundancy at the end of the collection period. Future research could begin collecting data at the beginning of the first academic year and continue through the second, looped year. The researcher could conduct multiple interviews of the teacher and the students

and their parents. This additional information would provide further data saturation. The information collected would offer a more in-depth understanding of the academic, social, and emotional stages and growth of students with learning disabilities as they proceed through two consecutive years of school with the same teacher and classmates.

Last, this study looked at the experiences of students with learning disabilities who looped only one year with their teacher and classmates. Future studies on looping could seek to acquire data on students and teachers who loop multiple years. This again would add a broader awareness of the academic, emotional, social experiences of students with learning disabilities who participate in a looped classroom.

Implications for Practice

From this phenomenological case study the academic performance of the student participants with reading and or math disabilities improved in these two subject areas, but the students with reading and math disabilities had scores that were still below grade level at the end of the fourth grade year. Based upon the information collected from this study alone, it is difficult to determine which factors contributed to the students' inability to obtain grade level scores. The contradicting results from previous research further complicate the explanations. Likewise, the students with speech disabilities improved their language skills. Yet, speech therapy was still required at the end of the fourth grade year. Again, there are no solid explanations for this phenomenon. Two viable predictions, however, will be presented.

First, if the students with learning disabilities continue to improve academically, at some point during their academic journey, they will reach grade level performance. Similarly, as the students with speech impairments continue to make progress in their language skills, they will no longer hold a speech disability. The second possible

prediction could be the students with reading and math disabilities will always have this disability. Progress will continue to be made, but reaching grade-level performance or correct speech may never be gained. Even though the disability may always be present, remaining for two or more academic years with the same teacher and peers provides an atmosphere of acceptance and support. This support allows the students to feel comfortable in the general classroom, which encourages them to participate in class discussions and volunteer to answer questions, which in turn increases their self-confidence.

In addition to the students' academic, social, and emotional experiences being interrelated, the student participants accepted their disability. Their disability was not only accepted by those who did not have a disability, but also by the children with disabilities. This acceptance influenced their peers to offer academic support when needed. More importantly, this acceptance enhanced the student participants' self-concept and self-confidence. Even though their academic performance may still be below grade level, the support from their peers and the improvement in their self-confidence may help their academic achievement. According to Abraham Maslow, as cited by Slavin (2006) the lower basic needs must be at least partially satisfied before a person will try to satisfy their higher-level needs. Therefore, if students with learning disabilities, who participate in a looped classroom, feel acceptance and a sense of belonging, they can be motivated to achieve academically. This connection between social relationships and academics supports the philosophy of the Koln-Holweide German school, relationships can affect academics (Ratzki, 1988).

It is clear the student participants' social behaviors displayed the most improvement. Socially, the students with disabilities adapted well. Feeling connected,

accepted, understood, and comfortable with their teacher and peers indicated the students with learning disabilities were more willing to affiliate with students with disabilities and students without disabilities and to engage in positive social relations with their teacher. The themes collected from this present research cannot be examined apart from each other, for they appear to influence one another. The academic, social, and emotional themes of this study confirm previous educators' thoughts and findings about the association among social relationships, one's self-confidence, and academic performance (Pate et al., 1993). Positive social interactions affect academic performance and also influence one's emotional well-being (Bowen, 1988). Academic performance also affects a student's self-confidence (Bursuck & Asher, 1986).

The academic, social, and emotional challenges encountered by students with learning disabilities during their academic journey have been described in various studies (Bowen, 1998; Bursuck, 1989; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). The gathered themes from this current phenomenological case study suggest looping as a solution to help meet the social and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities. Although the findings of this study did not reveal significant improvements in regard to the students' specified learning disabilities, remaining with the same teacher and classmates for two or more years provides positive social and academic support and social connectedness, which can increase their self-concepts and improve their self-confidence.

With recent demands for school districts to meet standards of learning and also with the requirement to include students with disabilities in the regular classroom, the educational method of looping could be considered as a viable educational approach for students with learning disabilities and their teachers. Based upon the findings of this

phenomenological case study, looping may assuage the problem of meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities within the general classroom.

REFERENCES

- AllPsych ONLINE: The virtual psychology classroom.* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://allpsych.com/dictionary/e.html>
- Almeida, Mary Jo (2004). The impact of looping of fourth grade students on their reading achievement. Ed.D. dissertation, Florida International University, United States -- Florida. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3151959).
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A., & Sorensen, C. (2006). *Introduction to research in education* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Bafile, C. (2003). In the loop: Teachers and students sticking together for a second year or more. *Education World*. Retrieved from http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin332.shtml
- Bafile, C. (2004). In the loop: Students and teachers progressing together. *Education World*. Retrieved from http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin120.shtml
- Baran, M. (2008). Assessing the effects of a middle school looping program. *International Journal of Learning*, 15(7), 185-191. Retrieved from Educational Research Complete database.
- Barnes, H. (1991). Learning that grows with the learner: An introduction to Waldorf education. *Educational Leadership* 49(2), 52-54. Retrieved from EbscoHost.
- Benasich, A., Curtiss, S., & Tallal, P. (1993). Language, Learning, and behavioral disturbances in childhood: A longitudinal perspective. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(3), 584-594.

- Bhattacharya, K. & Han, S. (2001). Piaget and cognitive development. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. Retrieved from <http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/>
- Black, S. (2000). Together again; the practice of looping keeps students with the same teachers. *The American School Board Journal*, 187(6), 40-43.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Bowen, M. (1998). Counseling interventions for students who have mild disabilities. *Professional School Counseling*, 2(1), 16-25. Retrieved from Associates Programs Source database.
- Brown University, Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory. (1997). *Looping: Supporting student learning through long-term relationships* (Report No. RJ96006401). Providence, RI: Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Lab at Brown University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED428832)
- Bryan, T., Burstein, K., & Ergul, C. (2004). The social-emotional side of learning disabilities: A science-based presentation of the state of the art. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 27, 45-51.
- Bulau, R. J. (2007). *Looping and its impact on student connectedness*. Ed.D. dissertation, Walden University, United States -- Minnesota. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3258025).
- Burke, D.. (1997). *Looping: Adding time, strengthening relationships* (Report No. EDO-PS-97-25). Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse of Elementary and Early

- Childhood Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED414098)
- Burke, D.. (1996). Multi-year teacher/student relationships are a long-overdue arrangement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(5), 360-361.
- Bursuck, W. (1989). A comparison of students with learning disabilities to low achieving and higher achieving students on three dimensions of social competence. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 22(3). Retrieved from E-Journals database.
- Bursuck, W., & Asher, S.. (1986). The relationship between social competence and achievement in elementary school children. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 15(1), 41-49.
- Cawley, J., Parmar, R., Yan, W., & Miller, J. (1998). Arithmetic computation performance of students with learning disabilities: Implications for the curriculum. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 13, 68-74.
- Chapman, J. (1988). Learning disabled children's self-concepts. *Review of Educational Research*, 58(3), 347-371.
- Chirichello, M., & Chirichello, C. (2001). A standing ovation for looping: The critics respond. *Childhood Education* 78(1), 2-9.
- Cistone, P., & Shneyderman, A. (2004). Looping: An Empirical Evaluation. *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, and Practice: Reconceptualizing Childhood Studies*, 5(1), 47-61. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Coben, S., & Zigmond, N. (1986). The social integration of learning disabled students from self-contained to mainstream elementary school settings. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 19(10), 614-618.
- Crosby, P. (1998). Looping in middle school: Why do it? *Teaching PreK-8*, 29(3), 46-

47. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Denault, L. (1999). Restructuring? Keep it simple...consider looping. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 65(4), 19-26.
- Elliott, D., & Capp, R. (2003). The gift of time: Multi-age teaching and curriculum design, or looping. Work to provide a continuum that maximizes learning. *Leadership*, 33(2), 34-38. Retrieved from Academic OneFile via Gale Group: <http://find.galegroup.com/ips/start.do?prodID=IPS>
- Estell, D., Jones, M. , Pearl, R., & Van Acker, R. (2009). Best friendships of students with and without learning disabilities across late elementary school. *Exceptional Children* 74(1), 110-124.
- Forsten, C., Grant, J., Johnson, B., & Richardson, I. (1997). *Looping Q & A: 72 practical answers to your most pressing questions*. Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books.
- Freeman, G., Gum, M., & Blackburn, J. M. (1999, March). *Proactive approaches to improving outcomes for at-risk students*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED430948)
- Fuller, B.. (2006). *The result of looping on the Mississippi Curriculum Test in a middle school*. Ph.D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, United States -- Mississippi. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3211236).
- Gaustad, J. (1998). *Implementing looping*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED429330)
- Geiger, P. (2000). Kids are getting “looped at school and loving it. *The Business*

Journal-Serving Phoenix & the Valley of the sun, 20(28) 53-55. Retrieved from Academic OneFile via Gale Group: <http://find.galegroup.com/ips/start.do?prodId=IPS>

George, P., & Lounsbury, J. (2000). *Making big schools feel small: Multiage grouping, looping, and schools-within-a-school*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

Goldberg, M. (December 1990/January 1991). Portrait of Deborah Meier. *Educational Leadership*, 48(4), 26-28.

Goodnow, C. (1992). Strengthening the links between educational psychology and the study of social contexts. *Educational Psychologist*, 27(2), 177-196. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Gragnolati, D. (2006). In the loop. *ACFNewsSource*. Retrieved from http://www.acfnewssource.org/education/in_the_loop.html

Grant, J., Johnson, B., & Richardson, I. (1996). *The looping handbook: Teachers and students progressing together*. Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books.

Grant, J., Richardson, I., & Forsten, C. (2000). In the loop. *School Administrator*. Retrieved, from <http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticedetail.cfm?ItemNumber=3813>

Gregory, B. (2009). *The impact of looping on academic and social experiences of middle school students*. Ed.D. dissertation, Walden University, United States -- Minnesota. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3369795).

Gresham, F., & MacMillan, D. (1997). Social competence and affective characteristics of students with mild disabilities. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(4), 377-

415.

- Gualtieri, C., Koriath, U., Van Bourgondien, M., & Saleeby, N. (1983). Language disorders in children referred to psychiatric services. *Journal of American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 22, 165-171.
- Guidry, W. The effects of looping on students' reading achievement enrolled in a gifted and talented class. Ed.D. dissertation, Lamar University - Beaumont, United States -- Texas. Retrieved April 25, 2011, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3415935).
- Gutek, G. (1995). *A history of the western educational experience*, (2nd Ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Hallahan, D., & Kauffman, J. (2006). *Exceptional learners: An introduction to special education* (10th ed.). New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Hallahan, D., Lloyd, J., Kauffman, J., Weiss, M., Martinez, E. (2005). *Learning disabilities: Foundations, characteristics, and effective teaching*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Hampton, F., Mumford, D., & Bond, L. (1997). *Enhancing urban student achievement through family oriented school practices*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Hanson, B. (1995). Getting to know you- multiyear teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 53(3), 42-43.
- Healy, J. (1991). Endangered minds. *New Horizons for Learning*. Retrieved September from http://www.newhorizons.org/future/Creating_the_Future/crfut_healy.html
- Hedge, A., & Cassidy, D. (2004). Teacher and parent perspectives of looping. *Early*

Childhood Education Journal, 32(2), 133-138.

- Hertrich, L. (2009). *The academic influences of second and third grade looping in one Delaware school district*. Ed.D. dissertation, Wilmington University (Delaware), United States -- Delaware. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3361924).
- Hitz, M., Sonners, M., & Jenlink, C. (2007). The looping classroom: Benefits for children, families, and teachers. *Young Children*, 62(2), 80-84. Retrieved from Education Research Complete database.
- Holmes, N. (2008). *The Impact of looping on student achievement in high performance schools*, Ed.D. dissertation, Walden University, United States – Minnesota. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3326985).
- Hooks, J., & Corbett, F. (2005). Looping: How it can work in higher education. *Online Submission* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED490548). Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Hume, K. (2007). Academic looping: Problem or solution? *Education Canada*, 47(2), 63. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). (2010). *Model core teaching standards: A resource for state dialogue*. Retrieved from [http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Interstate_Teacher_Assessment_Consortium_\(InTASC\).html](http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Interstate_Teacher_Assessment_Consortium_(InTASC).html)
- Kavale, K., & Forness, S. (1996). Social skills deficits and learning disabilities: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29, 226-237.
- Kenney, M. (2007). *Social and academic benefits of looping primary grade*

- students* (Master's thesis). San Rafael, CA: Dominican University of California School of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED496341)
- Kerr, D. (2002). *"In the loop" responses about looping at the middle school level as seen through different lenses*. Ed. D. dissertation, National-Louis University, United States – Chicago. Retrieved from EDRS: Full Text. (Publication No. ED479322).
- Krogman, J., & Van Sant, R. (2000). *Enhancing relationships and improving academics in the elementary school setting by implementing looping* (Master's thesis). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED443557)
- Lincoln, R. (1998). Successful looping at the middle school level. *Curriculum Administrator*, 34(3), 30-32.
- Little, T. S., & Dacus, N. B. (1999). Looping: Moving up with the class. *Educational Leadership*, 57(1), 42-45. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ592917)
- Liu, J. (1997). The emotional bond between teachers and students: Multi-year relationships. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(2), 156-157.
- Looping: Two years with the same class. (1998). *NEA Today*, Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Maras, P., & Aveling, E. (2006). Students with special educational needs: transitions from primary to secondary school. *British Journal of Special Education*, 33(4), 196-203. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8578.2006.00439.x.
- Mazzuchi, D., & Brooks, N. (1992). The gift of time. *Teaching Pre K-8*, 22(5), 60-62. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- McCauley, E. (2010). Transition from primary to post-primary school: What the post-

- primary teachers saw. *Reach Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, 23(2), 67-80. Retrieved from Education Research Complete.
- McClellan, D. (Ed.). (1995). On mixed-age grouping in preschool and elementary settings. *The MAGnet Newsletter*, 4(1) 1-4. Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20010708041327/http://ericps.edu.uiuc.edu/ece/pubs/mag>
- McCown, C., & Sherman, S. (2002). Looping for better performance in the middle school grades. *Middle School Journal*, 33(4), 17-21.
- Meadan, H., & Monda-Amaya, L. (2008). Collaboration to promote social competence for students with mild disabilities in the general classroom: A structure for providing social support. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 43(3), 158-167. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Milson, A. (2007). Interventions to assist students with disabilities through school transitions. *Professional School Counseling*, 10(3), 273-278. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Montague, M., & Graves, A. (1992). Teaching narrative composition to students with learning disabilities. In M. Pressley, K. Harris, & J. T. Guthrie (Eds.), *Promoting academic competence and literacy in schools* (pp. 261-276). New York: Academic Press.
- Moore, D. S. (2007). *The basic practice of statistics* (4th ed.). New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Multiyear assignment of teachers to students. (1998). *The Information Educator Series*, 1-7. Retrieved from Educational Research Service.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1991). *Accreditation Criteria and Procedures of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs*.

Washington, DC: Author.

Newberg, N. (1995). Clusters. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 713-720.

Nichols, J., & Nichols, G. (2002). The impact of looping classroom environments on parental attitudes. *Preventing School Failure*, 47(1), 18-25.

Ogletree, E. (1974). Rudolf Steiner: Unknown educator. *The Elementary School Journal*, 74(6), 344-352.

O'Neil, J. (2004). We're Baaack. *National Education Association Today*.

Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/neatoday/0404/feature1.html>

Ovalle, R. (2004). Why isn't looping a more common practice? A leadership case-study. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 13(2), 136-142.

Pate, P., Mizelle, N., Hart, L., Jordan, J., Matthews, R., Matthews, S., Scott, V., & Brantley, V.,(1993). The Delta project: A three-year longitudinal study of middle school change. *Middle School Journal*, 25(1), 24-27.

Pecanic, M. (2003). *The experience and effects of looping in the elementary classroom* (Master's thesis). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED499897)

Pratt, M. (2009). Looping to meet the needs of gifted children. *Principal*, 88(5), 22-24.

Retrieved from Education Research Complete database.

Ratzki, A. (1988). Creating a school community; one model of how it can be done. *American Educator*, 12(1), 10-17, 38-43.

Reinsmith, W. (1989). The whole in every part: Steiner and Waldorf schooling. *The Educational Forum*, 54(1), 79-91.

Reynolds, J., & Barnhart, B., & Martin, B. (1999). Looping: A solution to the retention vs. social promotion dilemma. *ERS Spectrum*, 17(2), 16-20.

- Ring, E., & Travers, J. (2005). Barriers to inclusion: a case study of a pupil with severe learning difficulties in Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 20(1), 41-56. Retrieved from E-Journals database.
- Rodriquez, C., & Arenz, B. (2007). The effects of looping on perceived values and academic achievement. *ERS Spectrum*, 24(3), 43-55.
- Schumaker, J. (1992). Social performance of individuals with learning disabilities: Through the looking glass of KU-IRLD Research. *School Psychology*, 21(3), 387-396.
- Schwandt, T., Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, (114), 11-25. doi:10.1002/ev.223.
- Simel, D. (1998). Education for building: Teacher attitudes toward looping. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 7(4), 330-337.
- Slavin, R. (2006). *Educational psychology: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Snoke, J. M. (2007). *Looping: The impact of a multi-year program on the academic progress, retention, and special education placements of students in two south central Pennsylvania schools*. Ed.D. dissertation, Duquesne University, United States -- Pennsylvania. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3270982).
- Swanson, H., & Malone, S. (1992). Social skills and learning disabilities: A meta-analysis of the literature. *School Psychology Review*, 21, 427-284.
- The benefits of looping. (2006). *Instructor*, 116(3), 17. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

- Thomas, M. (2005). The effects of looping on student achievement and self-efficacy of exceptional education students. Ed.D. dissertation, University of Central Florida, United States -- Florida. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3193509).
- Uhrmacher, P. (1993). Coming to know the world through Waldorf education. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 9(1), 87-104.
- Uhrmacher, P. (1995). Uncommon schooling: A historical look at Rudolf Steiner, anthroposophy, and Waldorf education. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 25(4), 381-406.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). *Weldon cooper center for public service, demographics & workforce group*. Retrieved from <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics>
- U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2010). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2009* (NCES 2010-013), Chapter 2.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, Office of Public Affairs. (2002). *No Child Left Behind Act* (Public Law No. 107-110). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *Individuals With Disabilities Educational Act* (Public Law No. 108-446). Retrieved from <http://www.copyright.gov/legislation/pl108-446.pdf>
- Vann, A. (1997). Leveling about looping. *Education Digest*, 63(2), 52.
- Walker, H., Irvin, L., Noell, J., Singer, G. (1992). A construct score approach to the assessment of social competence: Rationale, technological considerations, and anticipated outcomes. *Behavior Modification* 16(4), 448-474.
- Westerfield, T. (2009). *The effect of looping and teaming on rural black middle*

- school students' sense of belonging*. Ph.D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, United States -- Mississippi. Retrieved August 27, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3366253).
- Willis, R. (2009). Playful learning. *History Today*, 59(2), 20-21. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.
- Woodward, J., & Baxter, J. (1997). The effects of an innovative approach to mathematics on academically low-achieving students in inclusive settings. *Exceptional Children*, 63(3), 373-388.
- Wynne, E., & Walberg, H. (1994). Persisting groups: An overlooked force for learning. *Phi Delta Kappan* 75(7), 527-530.
- Yin, R. (1991). *Applications of case study research*. Washington, DC: Cosmos Corporation.
- Zahorik, J., & Dichanz, H. (1994). Teaching for understanding in German schools. *Educational Leadership* 51(5), 75-77. Retrieved from Ebscohost.
- .

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Appendix A

Permission Letter to School Principal

June 16, 2009
Mrs. Judy Smith (pseudonym)
Blueridge Elementary School (pseudonym)
22 School Street
Blueridge, VA 24639-9774

Dear Mrs. Smith:

I met with you last fall and we talked about differentiated learning, Howard Gardner, and math instruction. I hope this is enough information to jog your memory. Since our meeting, I have continued to work on my classes for my Ed. D. in Teaching and Learning. I have officially completed my coursework and I am currently attempting to solidify my dissertation topic.

I am sure you are familiar with the educational approach of looping. The benefits looping offers to students who have a learning disability and/or an emotional disability have really gained my attention. I had interviewed a couple of teachers last year who had engaged in this approach and the idea that I heard from them several times was how it had helped them to better serve their exceptional students and how they had witnessed the exceptional students' growth academically, socially, and emotionally. Consequently, I am seriously considering declaring my topic as *Experiences of Looping for Students With Special Needs*.

My research would be qualitative in nature; therefore, I am searching for a site that would be engaging in this method for the 2009-2010 academic year. From our short conversation, I realized that you are a principal that has an open mind to possible effective, non-traditional educational techniques and I am wondering if any grade(s) at your school may be looping this year. If not, would this be a consideration for you and your school?

I would like to meet with you to discuss this idea, but if it is not at all an option, would you mind emailing me or calling me to let me know. The sooner I have an idea, the sooner I can look for another site if needed. In addition, I have included an excerpt from the research I have done thus far on looping.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

Laura C. Brown
Counselor
Southwest Virginia Community College
276-964-7573
laura.brown@sw.edu

APPENDIX B
STUDENT BINDER

Appendix B

Student Binder

SECTION ONE COPIES

1. IEP
2. Signed Parent Participant Consent Form, Parent Questionnaire
3. Signed Teacher Participant Consent Form, Teacher Interview Form, Transcribed Notes
4. Signed Parent Consent for Child to Participate Form, Verbal Assent of Minors Form, Student Interview Form, Transcribed Notes
5. Social Competence Checklist, Typed Observation Notes
6. STAR Table

SECTION TWO MATRICES

1. IEP – Academic, Social, Emotional
2. Parent Survey – Academic, Social, Emotional
3. Teacher Interview – Academic, Social, Emotional
4. Student Interview – Academic, Social, Emotional
5. Social Competence Checklist and Observation Notes – Academic, Social, Emotional
6. STAR Table - Academic

SECTION THREE THEMES

1. Academic
2. Social
3. Emotional

APPENDIX C

**PARENT CONSENT FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE FORM
STUDENT WHO LOOPED FROM THIRD GRADE TO FOURTH GRADE**

Appendix C

**Parent Consent for Child to Participate Form
Student Who Looped from Third Grade to Fourth Grade**

Child's name: _____

Parent/Guardian name: _____

I authorize Laura C. Brown of the Student Services Department of Southwest Virginia Community College in Richlands, VA to gather information from my child and about my child in regard to their experiences while in a looped classroom. I understand my child's participation will involve an individual interview, examination of their STAR English and Math scores, examination of their IEP, and observations at the school. Interviews will be digitally voice-recorded for further review by the researcher. I understand my child has been selected based upon their learning disability. My child and I have been assured that my child may refuse to discuss any matters that cause discomfort or that my child might experience as an unwanted invasion of privacy.

I understand that I may withdraw my child from the study at any time AND that my child may decline to participate or terminate participation AT ANY TIME without penalty. My child will be asked by the researcher to give his/her verbal assent for participation in this study. This study is unlikely to cause my child distress. However, I understand that after participation, if my child experiences any undue anxiety or stress that may have been provoked by the experience, Laura C. Brown will be available for consultation. Mrs. Brown is a professional counselor who is trained to respond ethically and effectively to my child's needs.

Confidentiality of the research results will be maintained by the researcher. No individual results will be released without my written consent. The collected data will only be read and listened to by the researcher and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the researcher. The voice recordings will be stored for three-years. After the three-year period, the recordings will be permanently discarded.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent for my child to participate in the study.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the teacher in the envelope provided. The other copy you may keep for your records. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Judy Shoemaker, at 863-604-0111 or jshoemaker@liberty.edu or the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Laura C. Brown, 276-964-7573, laura.brown@sw.edu

APPENDIX D
PARENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Appendix D

Parent Participant Consent Form

Participant's name: _____

I authorize Laura C. Brown of the Student Services Department at Southwest Virginia Community College in Richlands, VA to gather information from me on the topic of looping and my child with a learning disability.

I understand the questionnaire items are general in nature. However, I am aware that I may choose not to answer any question that I find offensive. I also understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress that may have been provoked by the experience, Laura C. Brown will be available for consultation. Mrs. Brown is a professional counselor who is trained to respond ethically and effectively to my needs

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher. My individual results will not be released without my written consent. The collected data will only be read by the researcher and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the researcher.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the teacher in the envelope provided. The other copy you may keep for your records.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Judy Shoemaker, at 863-604-0111 or jshoemaker@liberty.edu or the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Laura C. Brown
276-964-7573
laura.brown@sw.edu

APPENDIX E
PARENT LOOPING QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix E

Parent Looping Questionnaire

Parent's name: _____

Directions: Please write your response to the following items. You may use the back of the form or additional pages if necessary.

1. Describe what you have noticed about your child's academics while being with the same teacher for two years.

2. Describe what you have noticed about your child's relationship with their teacher after being with her for two years.

3. Describe what you have noticed about your child's relationships with their classmates after being with them for two years.

4. Describe any feelings your child has shared with you about their school work and grades after being with the same teacher and classmates for two years.

5. Describe any feelings your child has shared with you about their relationships with their classmates after being with them for two years.

6. Describe any feelings your child has shared with you about how they feel about themselves after being with the same teacher and classmates for two years.

7. Describe your overall thoughts and feelings about your child being with the same teacher and students for two years.

APPENDIX F
FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO PARENT

Appendix F

Follow-up Letter to Parent

May 25, 2011

Dear Parent,

I am very appreciative that you have consented for me to collect information on your child. During the interactions I have had with them thus far, I have realized what a bright, pleasant student they are. The purpose of this letter is that I have noticed I have not received the parent questionnaire from you. I realize this takes some time, but know your input is welcomed and will be very important to my research. I have attached another copy of the form in case you may have misplaced it. If you wouldn't mind taking the time to complete this and return it by this Thursday, June 2, I will be very grateful. I have also attached an envelope for you to place the questionnaire in to return to your child's teacher. She will not open this envelope. It will be given directly to me. Please know anything you share will be kept confidential between you and me. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at the below information.

Thank you in advance,
Laura C. Brown
276-964-7573
laura.brown@sw.edu

APPENDIX G
TEACHER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Appendix G

Teacher Participant Consent Form

Participant's name: _____

I authorize Laura C. Brown of the Student Services Department at Southwest Virginia Community College in Richlands, VA to gather information from me on the topic of looping and the students' with learning disabilities experiences in my classroom. Interviews will be digitally voice-recorded for further review by the researcher.

I understand the questionnaire items are general in nature. However, I am aware that I may choose not to answer any question I find offensive. I also understand if after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress that may have been provoked by the experience, Laura C. Brown will be available for consultation. Mrs. Brown is a professional counselor who is trained to respond ethically and effectively to my needs.

Confidentiality of the research results will be maintained by the researcher. My individual results will not be released without my written consent. The collected data will only be read and listened to by the researcher and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the researcher. The voice recordings will be stored for three years. After the three-year period, the recordings will be permanently discarded.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher. The other copy you may keep for your records.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Judy Shoemaker, at 863-604-0111 or jshoemaker@liberty.edu or the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Laura C. Brown
276-964-7573
laura.brown@sw.edu

APPENDIX H
TEACHER INTERVIEW FORM

Appendix H

Teacher Interview Form

How has Student 'A' improved or not improved academically?

How has Student 'A' interacted with his or her peers?

How has Student 'A' interacted with you?

How would you describe Student 'A's emotional adjustment?
In what ways, if any has this changed over the past two years?

Follow-up questions will be asked to gain clarification of the structured questions.

APPENDIX I

VERBAL ASSENT OF MINORS FORM

Appendix I

Verbal Assent of Minors Form

Participant's name: _____

"I'm studying children to find out how they feel about school and what they think about being with the same teacher and classmates for more than one year. I'd really like to know what you think. I'd like to ask you some questions about school. If you need to use the names of other students in your answers, please tell me only their first names. If there's anything you don't want to answer, it's okay to tell me you don't want to answer that question. Also, I don't want to forget what you tell me, so I'd like to write down and record your answers. I'll be the only one to listen to the recording. Is that okay with you?"

"After participating in this session, if you want to talk about any thoughts and feelings that bother you, you can ask your teacher to make a time for you to talk with me about them."

APPENDIX J
STUDENT INTERVIEW FORM

Appendix J

Student Interview Form

Participant's name: _____

What do you think about being with the same teacher for two years?

How did being with the same teacher for two years make you feel?

What do you think about being with the same classmates for two years?

How did being with the same classmates for two years make you feel?

Additional questions will be asked as follow-ups to the students' responses to gather data regarding their academic, social, and emotional experiences.

APPENDIX K
SOCIAL COMPETENCE CHECKLIST

Appendix K
Social Competence Checklist

Student 'A:' _____

Day: _____ Time: _____

Setting: _____

Teacher-Related Adjustment

Adaptive Total

Complies Promptly _____

Follows Rules _____

Works Independently _____

Follows Directions _____

Listens to Teacher _____

Finishes Class Work _____

Maladaptive

Steals _____

Defies Teacher _____

Tantrums _____

Disturbs Others _____

Cheats _____

Swears _____

Aggressive _____

Ignores Teacher _____

Appendix K Continued

Peer-Related Adjustment

Adaptive

Total

Cooperates with Peers _____

Supports Peers _____

Defends Self in Arguments _____

Remains Calm _____

Leads Peers _____

Compliments Peers _____

Affiliates with Peers _____

Maladaptive

Disrupts Group _____

Acts Snobbish _____

Aggresses

Indirectly _____

Starts Fights _____

Short Temper _____

Braggs _____

Gets in Trouble with Teacher _____

Seeks Help Constantly _____

APPENDIX L

TABLE: STAR READING AND MATH SCORES

Appendix L

Table: Star Reading and Math Scores

Reading	3 rd Grade - 2010	4 th Grade -2011
Student	End of Year Grade Equivalent Score	End of Year Grade Equivalent Score
A	2.9	3.6
B	5.2	6.5
C	2.1	2.5
D	1.0	1.4
E	4.7	3.7
Math	3 rd Grade - 2010	4 th Grade - 2011
Student	End of Year Grade Equivalent Score	End of Year Grade Equivalent Score
A	3.2	3.5
B	6.0	6.3
C	3.4	3.9
D	2.6	4.3
E	3.6	6.7

APPENDIX M

EXAMPLE: THEME DOCUMENT FOR EACH STUDENT

Appendix M

Example: Theme Document for Each Student

1. Adaptive teacher-related social behaviors
 - a. Follows rules and directions
 - b. Listens to teacher
 - c. Finishes class work
 - d. Helps teacher – Gym with jump rope
 - e. Follows along as teacher gives directions
 - f. Friends with teacher – parent
 - g. She's been fun; she jokes with us some times
 - h. More comfortable with teacher – teacher
 - i. Interactions are better – talks to be about things in their home life
 - j. I play and goof-off at times; student enjoys that; student looks forward to the fun times
 - k. Gained some socially –teacher
2. Adaptive peer-related social behaviors
 - a. Affiliates with peers
 - b. Supports peers –gives information to peers
 - c. More social with friends and classmates than last year - teacher
 - d. Comfortable around them; gained some socially - teacher
 - e. Enlist Student C's help with a new student; Student C will sit and talk to the new student
 - f. I see the student talking to some other kids they didn't talk to last year
 - g. Everybody loves/likes Student – teacher and observations
 - h. Classmates are willing to do whatever to help Student C – teacher and observations
 - i. Student C accepts help from others well – teacher and observations
 - j. Plays with other students – boys and girls - observations
 - k. Verbally interacts with boys and girls - observations
 - l. Kinda good to have the same classmates for 2 years - student
 - m. Some of them are nice – student
 - n. They help me with stuff like reading and spelling – student
 - o. Would be a good thing if the student found out they would have the same classmates next year – student
 - i. In case I needed help in something, they could help me
 - p. Good friends – parent
 - q. Enjoyed being with the same classmates – parent

APPENDIX N

EXAMPLE: THEMES AMONG THE STUDENTS DOCUMENT

Appendix N

Example: Themes among the Students Document

STRONG – 3 or more students

1. Below grade level in reading – A, C, D
2. Progress made in reading – A, B, C, D, E*
3. Progress made in math – A, B, C, D, E
4. Participated in class by raised hand – A, B, C, D, E
5. Does not volunteer to read aloud in class – A, B, C, D
6. Gave best effort at school work – B, C, D
7. Frequent read aloud support from teacher – C, D, E
8. Liked math – C, D, E
9. Struggles with spelling – C, D, E
10. Finished class assignments – A, B, C, D, E*

WEAK – 2 students

1. Rushed through assignments – C, E
2. Below grade level in math – A, C
3. Struggles with writing – D, E
4. Reading support from classmates – C, D,
5. Thought reading support from classmates would be good – C, D
6. Looks around the room as passages are read – D, E
7. Took risks of being wrong – A, B