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Looping: Building Strong Relationships Between Teachers, Students, Families

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Looping: Building Strong Relationships Between

Teachers, Students and Families

A Project Report

Presented to

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ABSTRACT

Looping: Building Strong Relationships Between

Teachers, Students and Families

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Looping is the practice of a teacher staying with the same group of students for two or three years. The paper discusses the effects that looping has on the relationships teachers form with students and families. An overview of the history of looping is followed by the benefits that looping provides for students, families and teachers. The project is a guide for teacher and schools that want to implement looping. The project includes ways to organize looping classrooms, student selection and areas to be mindful of.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is more than having students learning facts or memorizing spelling words. A very important part of teaching is the relationships that form between students, families and teacher. These relationships are an important part of teaching. It allows for the students to feel comfortable and accepted. When students feel this way they are willing to take risks and try new things. The relationship is important for families in that they feel connected to the school and can become partners in the education of their children. They feel welcomed and know the school is a safe and caring environment. For teachers the relationships are what make the classroom feel warm and inviting. Teachers know that children can thrive in this type of environment. These types of relationships take time and time is one of the factors that can interfere with relationships forming. A way to alleviate the time factor is through a practice called looping.

Looping is the term used when a teacher stays with a group of assigned students for two or three consecutive years. If a teacher taught first grade the teacher would then "loop" with the students to second grade or third grade. When the loop is over the teacher goes back to the first grade and starts over. The word "looping" comes from the motion of a teacher that loops back to lead another group of students through the two grades (Bracey, 1999). Looping is not a new concept. The Waldorf Schools in Germany are based on the work of Rudolf Stineer, an Austrian educator. Stineer believed that children must be guided and mentored by one individual through the early education years (Little & Little, 2001). The extra time that teachers have with students allows them

to build the relationships on which much of children's learning depends (Burke, 1997).

The Koln-Holweide system is another form of looping in Germany. The schools use a

"Team-Small-Group-Plan" in which 85 to 90 students are team-taught by six to eight

teachers for six years. The system focuses on small table groups of six students

forming a cooperative learning team. The team gets to know that each individual's

success contributes to the success of the group. The teachers and students form tight

bonds within the close school community (Little & Little, 2001). Looping can also be

found in Israel, Sweden, Japan and Italy. The Italian preschools are considered by

some the best in the world. They use a model of three year assignments of students to

teachers, and both parents and teachers are considered as team members (Palestis,

1994). The idea that students fare better when they stay with teachers more than one

year is well established in Europe and Asia (Bracey, 1999). Despite enthusiastic

practitioners and favorable research looping is still uncommon enough in the United

States to be considered innovative (Burke, 1996). The United States did have a time

when students attended one-room schoolhouses and stayed with a teacher more than

one year. However, this arrangement was more out of necessity rather than an

educational philosophy (Simel, 1998). It cannot be considered real "looping".

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project was to develop a guide to help schools and or

teachers that want to build meaningful relationships in their classrooms through looping.

Teachers are asked to teach an increasingly diverse population of students and to

accept their individual differences (Lacina-Gifford, 2001). It can be extremely difficult for teachers to build these relationships and foster deep understanding of each student's individual differences in one year. Building relationships with families can also be hard. Some parents may have had a negative educational experience themselves as children and feel uncomfortable contacting the school or the teacher with their concerns (Nichols & Nichols, 2002). The guide will help schools that want to build strong relationships through looping.

There are many ideas to consider when implementing looping and the project will explain them. It will be a good resource for administrators and teachers to refer to when designing their own program. The project will include ways to get the program started, areas to be mindful of, which grade levels are best suited for looping, student assignment and many other things that need to be addressed when implementing looping.

Scope of the Project

The scope of this project is focused on elementary schools. Most of the research that is conducted on looping is on the effect it has on elementary school students. The project is intended to be used by elementary schools and may not be suitable for middle or high schools. The elementary teacher teaches all subject areas and is therefore able to stay in one room with the students. The middle and high school teachers have only one subject to teach and may not have the equipment or endorsement to teach different subjects.

Definition of Terms

Looping: The act of a teacher and students advancing together from one grade level to

the next (Nevin, Cramer, Voigt, & Slazar, 2008).

Looping Cycle: The number of years that teachers and students are together. A cycle
can last two or more years. At the end of the cycle the teacher begins again with a new
group of students. (Gaustad, 1998)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Research shows that looping can cause strong relationships to be formed between students, teachers and parents. These strong relationships can lead to students having less anxiety and emotional stress at school. The relationships allow teachers to know the needs of all their students and parents start feeling connected and get more involved with their children's school and learning. The most beneficial gains from looping with a group of children is the knowledge that the teacher has of his or her students, the confidence the students have in their teacher and the communication lines that develop between the parents and teacher (Nichols & Nichols, 2002). In this chapter, the author will discuss the benefits that looping has for students, teachers and parents. The last section of the chapter will describe the disadvantages that can occur in a looping arrangement.

Benefits for Students

The benefits that students gain from a looping classroom are both academic and social. Gaustad (1998) states that, "for students, having the same teacher and classmates for two or more years provides stability and builds a sense of community. Looping can reduce anxiety and increase confidence for many children, enabling them to blossom both socially and as learners" (p.1). These benefits come from students and teacher having more time to build a strong relationship.

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The social benefits in a looped classroom come from the students having a strong relationship with their teacher. The relationship becomes strong because there are more opportunities for bonding between teachers and students (Burke, 1997). The bonds that are formed lead to students having less anxiety about school and greater emotional stability. Students are comfortable with their teacher and the classroom. The classroom can become a home away from home (Bafile, 2004). Students build a sense of community and are excited about coming to school. The sense of community is built by the students having more time to establish positive peer relationships (Burke, 1997). These relationships are important for students feeling like they belong to a community. Johnston (2000) found that primary looping students have a more positive attitude toward school. This positive attitude leads to an increase in attendance (Forsten, Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1997). Students are excited about coming to school because of the strong friendships they have created. The positive attitudes, increased attendance, student teacher bond and strong sense of community are beneficial for all students. The bonds formed in a looping classroom are especially beneficial for shy students, students who do not adapt well to new or changing situations and for students who have unstable home lives (Denault, 1999). Students know that they are safe and an important part of the classroom. Little and Little (2001) also found that, "when students feel nurtured in an on-going student-teacher relationship and develop cohesion with the teacher, classmates, and the school, they are less likely to display violent behaviors in a school setting" (p.7). The on-going relationship makes the student feel connected to the school and his/her teacher. This connection can lead to long term relationships being formed.

A benefit of long-term relationships being formed between students and teachers is trust. Students trust that they are safe and supported and are more likely to take risks and try new things. Students are more willing to speak up, volunteer for activities, and ask questions, and they find it less stressful to make mistakes. Students feel more comfortable and connected and therefore are better able to learn that children who are unhappy or are uncomfortable in a given situation (Brandt, 1998). When students are willing to try new things and are comfortable with making mistakes, they are more open to learning from their mistakes. This openness can lead to gains in their academic achievement.

The academic gains are reflected in reports of improvement in students' achievement (Burke, 1997). These gains can be attributed to the extra instructional time gained by looping. Looping can add an extra month of learning time to the school year (Burke, 1996). Teachers and students in looping classes need not start from scratch every fall (Gaustad, 1998). The students know the classroom rules and expectations. Students in looping classrooms also have a better understanding of the teachers' expectations and discipline routines (Little & Little, 2001). They also have less apprehension about the start of a new year (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). Students change from one grade to the next with a minimum of anxiety (Grant, Johnston & Richardson, 1996). The reduction in anxiety is from the students already having a relationship with the teacher. The teachers understanding of the students' strengths and weakness can lead to teaching occurring on the first day of school. Teachers in a non-looping

classroom can spend up to three or five weeks assessing students reading, math and writing abilities. In a study by Little and Dacus (1999) a teacher responded:

> "Gone were the lectures about daily procedures and classroom rules. Gone were the weeks of testing, trying to determine a student's reading level. The teachers and students started the year with a bang and ended further along than the teachers had anticipated" (p.43).

Students and teachers do not have to start the year getting to know each other. They get to start the year learning, which can lead to them getting more done with the time they have together.

The academic benefits of looping can be for both general education students and special education students. One of the goals of successful inclusion is to help develop peer support that will encourage all students to feel accepted (Nevin, Cramer, Voigt, & Salazar, 2008). The extra time that looping gives allows the students to build that support system. With that system in place students with special needs can improve their confidence and have friends that can help them succeed. One type of special education is for gifted children. These students can also gain academic benefits from looping. By looping, students become familiar with the program's atmosphere, rules, procedures, and routines, and appreciate that there is no repetition of unnecessary class content (Pratt, 2009). Students who are not in special education but still need extra help can benefit the most from looping. It gives slower students more time to learn basic skills (Burke, 1997). Delviso and Muffs (2007) stated that, "looping allows more time to observe, analyze and employ alternate strategies before making critical

recommendations regarding issues such as retention (p.26). Swanson (1999) pointed out:

> Looping allows the teacher to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of the individual, rather than attempting to meet the needs of the whole class. The one sure way to improve student achievement is to know each student and work collaboratively with parents to meet that student's academic needs (p.44).

It is the structure of the looping classroom that is effective in providing opportunities for improved academic achievement. Teachers can take advantage of the structure to improve their teaching and student success.

<div align="center">Benefits for Teachers</div>

The greatest advantage teachers get from looping is more time. Looping essentially adds an extra month of teaching/learning time during the second year when the typical transitional period at the beginning of the year is unnecessary (Burke, 1996). Teachers generally spend three to five weeks at the beginning of the school year assessing students, getting to know their learning styles and personalities, and establishing classroom rules and routines. This is not the case for a teacher who has looped. Looping eliminates the time lost at the beginning of each year when the new teacher is getting to know students, their various leaning levels, and their many different needs (Little & Little 2001). Teaching a child for more than one year allows the teacher to gain knowledge about a child's intellectual development over time (Nevin, Cramer, Voigt, Salazar, 2008).

Looping also allows for more opportunities for bonding between teacher and students (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). Teachers already know the students and both are familiar with each other and have built a relationship. In a study by Jordan (2000) a teacher stated,

> "Instead of nervous teachers, suffering sleep deprivation, and students who were scared, we started out the very first day with well-rested, happy teachers and students who felt safe and confident. Learning began on the first day of school, not the second month" (p.59).

Teachers in a looped class get the benefit of knowing their students. The teachers know exactly what each student needs to be successful. Returning from the summer break, teachers lose no time at all and students do not have to learn how to catch up, because both students and teachers know precisely what had been mastered the previous year (Elliott & Capp, 2003). They get to start the year teaching new ideas and not spending time reviewing.

The long term relationship that is built allows for a more stable learning environment and teachers can adjust their teaching based on the known needs of the students. Trust and support is the foundation of the student/teacher relationship. When students feel that they belong and they can trust their teacher they are more likely to come to school and be on-task. Forsten, Grant and Richardson (1999) state that, "Students showed improvement in attendance and significant reductions in disciplinary and suspension problems (p.15). Bracey (1999) found that teachers had more time to analyze and observe the children and more time to try different strategies. Teachers in a

looped classroom have the time to find a way to ensure that every student can be successful both socially and academically. Each student will respond differently to discipline and redirection. Looping gives the teacher time to find the strategy that works for each student.

This time also allows teachers to postpone high stakes decisions such as retention and referrals to services for learning disabilities (Reynolds, Barnhart & Martin, 1999). Teachers in a looped classroom have the ability to look critically at the entire curriculum for two consecutive grade levels. They are able to try various alternatives before making decisions. Teachers are able to provide appropriate activities over the longer two year period to students who need to master certain basic skills (Burke, 1997) Looping's longer time-frame increases motivation to resolve problems that might have been overlooked for one year (Gaustad, 1998). Teachers know that they have more time to take students from where they are to where they need to be at the end of the loop. In a looped class the second year is where the big payoff occurs. The teacher knows exactly what the students have learned, since he/she was a big part of what was taught (Elliot & Capp, 2003).

Teachers also have the opportunity to cover an advanced curriculum. As the first year curriculum is mastered, teachers can begin to delve into the content of the second year with students. Then teachers continue in the second year by expanding on this knowledge and studying these areas more in depth (Brandt, 1998). Teachers can build on the students' prior knowledge and previous experiences from the first year. Looping

teachers use a wider variety of teaching methods and assessment to better meet the needs of their students (Denault, 1999).

Benefits for Parents

One of the hardest parts of teaching is connecting with and establishing trusting and positive relationships with parents. Limited time is what can constrain these relationships from forming (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009). A looping arrangement can give teachers and parents plenty of time to build and sustain personal relationships (Nevin, Cramer, Voigt & Salazar, 2008). Many parents may also have had a less that positive educational experience themselves as children and feel uncomfortable contacting the school. Looping for two or more years may encourage more parent involvement and may also support communication on a deeper level (Nichols & Nichols, 2002). Elliott and Capp found that parents are excited about looping as a new model of schooling (2003). It gives them the time they need to build a relationship with their child's teacher. These relationships are important in that they can have an impact on a child's success in school.

Parents' attitudes toward the school and teachers can be affected by their students looping. Little and Little (2001) report that parents feel more comfortable during parent-teacher conferences and that they view their child's teacher as an ally and a partner in their child's education. Looping can turn parents into supporters and they report feeling more respected by teachers, have more confidence in their children's

teachers and administrators and are more likely to seek the school's assistance with their children (Burke, 1997). The familial structure of looping provides an avenue by which parents, along with their children, can feel a sense of belonging or community (Nichols & Nichols, 2002). It is the responsibly of parents and school personnel to reach out to collaborate in supporting students' education by forming meaningful relationships (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009).

Emeagwali (2009) said that, "A successful relationship between teachers and parents is integral to students' achievement" (p.8). When a relationship is formed, it can open the door for communication. In education, the need for strong lines of communication is critical, especially in the relationships that exit between teachers and the parents of their students (Schumacher, 2007). Open and strong lines of communication can lead to teachers and parents forming a partnership. The partnership is based on trust and open communication. Parents and teachers will see that they have a common goal of educating students. The parents' drive toward this goal is out of love and concern for the child. The teachers' is moved by his or her professional responsibly to successfully do the work in which they have been trained (Schumacher, 2007). This partnership leads to parents gaining a greater understanding of their child's academic and social needs and they tend to become more active participants in their child's education (Forsten, Grant & Richardson, 1999). Witmer (2005) found that, "Parental involvement has a powerful impact upon the education of their children" (p.225). Children will understand that both their teacher and parents want them to be successful and that there is a connection between school and home.

The partnership and strong relationship that teachers and parents have formed allows for ongoing problem solving and collaboration that benefits everyone (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009). Gaustad (1998) found that looping's longer time frame increases motivation to resolve problems that might have been put off for one year and that difficult students and parents may change their behavior when they face a second year of consistent expectations. Both teachers and parents have made an effort to build the relationship and are more open with each other. It can be difficult for teachers and parents in non-looping schools to have this level of openness. One reason for the difficultly that non-looping teachers and parents face is the low level of stability and persistence that often exists in school organization (Nichols & Nichols, 2002).The link between school and parents in looping classrooms has been strengthened so that when a problem arises, all involved, the child, teacher and parent, help to work things through. (Barnes, 1991). The trusting relationship developed between parents and teachers makes it possible for both to reflect on growth and change over a greater time period and to discuss and direct long-range goals for their children (Nichols & Nichols, 2002).

A student simply remaining with the same teacher and cohort group for multiple years may have several positive outcomes, including more positive parent attitudes toward the school and teachers (Nichols & Nichols, 2002). Nichols and Nichols (2002) also found that parents of looping children had significantly more positive attitudes toward their child's teacher and school and had more positive perceptions of their child's behavior at school than did parents of children with non-looping backgrounds. In a study

by Pratt (2009) 100 percent of parents replied that looping was a positive experience for their child. In that same study (Pratt, 2009) one parent responded that, "Looping has been the best experience for my child. Her teacher had grown to know my child better than any other teacher has in the past. Knowing the whole child allows for a fuller experience in the classroom" (p.23). Another parent responded (Pratt, 2009) that, "My daughter was very happy to have her teacher for three years as she has had problems in the past with self-esteem. Her teacher made her feel comfortable and secure at school" (p.23). Involvement in looping environments was found to be a significant predictor of positive parent perceptions of student motivation and attitude toward the school. To give students the best education possible it is essential that families and schools partner together (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009). Both parents and teachers are committed to providing the best education to students. Looping may be an avenue to address this educational commitment in support of all students.

Disadvantages of Looping

Even with the immense number of advantages to looping, there are also some disadvantages. The disadvantages range from student-teacher personality clashes, problematic student mixtures, unreasonably demanding parents and specific weaknesses of a generally good teacher (Gaustad, 1998). When parents are approached with the idea of looping conflicting views appear. Some recall their desire to remain with a favorite teacher for more than one school year, or sigh in relief that they were not committed to stay with a disliked teacher beyond a year's time (Nichols &

Nichols, 2002). The greatest concern of parents is that their child will spend two or more years with an ineffective teacher (Grant, Richardson & Forsten, 2000).

The ineffectiveness of a teacher can be due to many factors. The teacher may be new or new to a grade level. Teaching time may be lost as the teacher is trying to master the curriculum (Vann, 1997). The teacher may also have stress about the added responsibility of having the same students for multiple years. Looping may also not be what the teacher wanted to do. Mandating does not work; commitment is the goal of looping. A looping design requires major conceptual change and some teachers may not be prepared, or well suited for teaching in a looping classroom (Forsten, Grant & Richardson, 1999). The single most important factor in the success of the looping classroom is the commitment of the teacher (Little & Little, 2001).

The potential of an inappropriate match or personality conflict between teacher and student is also mentioned as a disadvantage of looping (Burke, 1997). If these conflicts cannot be solved within the first year, they may have the potential of becoming larger problems in the second year. Delviscio and Muffs (2007) stated that, "the possibility that the personalities of the teacher and student could clash enough to make the thought of working together more than one year a counterproductive concept should be kept in mind" (p.27) It may also be that students who are disliked by their peers and teased could have a negative situation the second year of the loop (Vann, 1997). Another disadvantage is that students find themselves facing boredom due to the familiarity of the teaching techniques if the teacher is not taking the initiative to try new

methods ("Multiyear Assignment", 1997). Looping should be an option. Students, teachers and parents should be given the choice of continuing with the program.

The mobility of the student population may also have an effect on the success of looping. Student populations that are highly mobile do not remain long enough to obtain the benefits of a looping class. Looping can be challenging for students who enter the program in the second year, particularly for the class that has five or more new students (Simel, 1998). These new students do not have the experiences and knowledge that the rest of the class has. New students or students that move away could also be negatively affected if the curriculum is viewed as a two-year approach (Vann, 1997). If the teacher plans the curriculum as a two year approach, instead of teaching the curriculum for each year, students that leave may have holes in their education. Students with special needs may also be at a disadvantage. The looping teacher may put off the decision of referring a student for special education because of the extra time that a loop gives, resulting in the student not receiving the support they need. Looping may also not be as beneficial to students in the later elementary grades. Johnston (2000) found that primary students in looping classes had more positive attitudes toward school, but this was not true of students who looped in intermediate grades. Over familiarity with peers and the teacher can invite problems for students in intermediate grades. The students know what will set the others off and who is likely to go along with them if they want to cause trouble (Simel, 1998).

Some students and teachers may experience emotional difficulty leaving their classes at the end of a loop (Gaustad, 1998). There is the possibility of becoming too

attached and this can make it difficult for the students to move on to a new class and for

the teacher that starting over with a new group. Students and teachers will both need to

deal with the extra adjustments they need to make to the new class after spending two

years together (Hanson, 1995). While remaining together may be beneficial for some

students, it can also be a disadvantage to others. Familiarity with one another and

problems related to this are magnified in a looping classroom (Forsten, Grant &

Richardson, 1999).

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

The procedure used to conduct the research was a review of the literature related to looping, student achievement, parental involvement and school relationships. The literature that was selected had to be published before 1990 and be peer reviewed. Literature that did not meet these criteria was not included in the review. Literature was found using Central Washington University's data base of periodical articles, online journals, government documents, financial and statistics databases. The articles were printed and examined by the researcher to ensure they met the criteria.

The project will be implemented by having a copy of the project put in the staff library at Renton Park Elementary. Administrators and/or teachers at the school can use the guide to help them implement looping or answer questions they have about looping. The project will also be available to other schools in the Renton School District. The project is an easy to follow guide that will help administrators and/or teacher get looping started in their schools.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROJECT

Introduction

This project is a guide to be used by elementary administrators and or teachers who want to implement looping in their schools. It explains the benefits of looping and the steps needed to start looping in a classroom or school wide. The guide shows how to organize the grade levels into loops, discusses students selection and teacher/parents options. The guide contains a section on areas that should be avoided when establishing looping in classrooms and schools.

A Guide to Elementary Looping

Gary Aguilar

Renton School District

May 2010

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What is Looping?

Looping is the practice of a teacher staying with a group of students for more than one year. Although a teacher can loop with their students for two or three years, in most cases the teacher only does a two year loop. Looping usually requires two teachers in consecutive grades; a third grade teacher moves up to fourth grade, while the fourth grade teacher moves down to third and starts a new loop.

| Class A
First Year
Third Grade | Class B
Second Year
Fourth Grade |
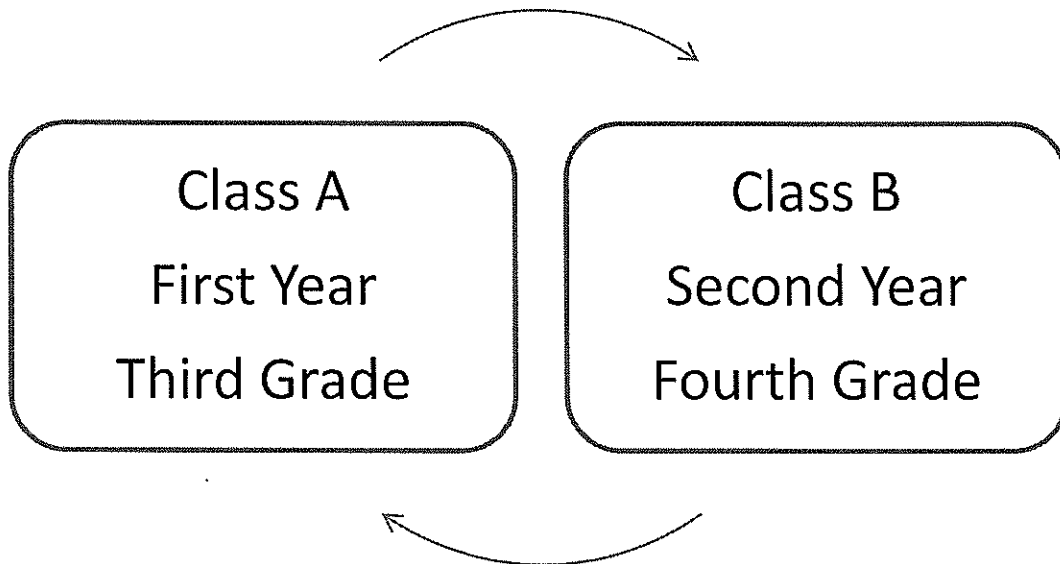
Looping is low cost educational model that has many benefits and studies have shown an increase in student achievement.

The Benefits of Looping

More Time to Teach

- Teachers in looping classrooms can gain up to four weeks of instructional time.
- Teachers do not need to review or assess students ablities at the start of the second year.
- The "getting to know you" time is limited.
- Instruction starts on day one.

Strong Teacher and Student Relationships

- Students know their teacher and are willing to take risks and try new things.
- Teachers know students abilities and can give extra help when needed or help students to expand their learning.
- Students who have looped are absent less, have fewer discipline problems and tend to enjoy school more than non-looped peers.
- Students know the routines and expections of the teacher.

Strong Teacher and Parent Relationships

- Teachers and parents understand the needs of their student.
- Parents and teacher work together to ensure that the student is succesful.
- Increased parent involvment.
- Students know that both their teacher and parents are working together to ensure their success.

Getting Started

The first decision is who is going to loop. Looping works best if teachers make the choice to loop; research has shown that the benefits of looping are drastically reduced if teachers are forced into looping. Looping can be done by one teacher if a school needs to add another section at a particular grade level and the teacher moves up, but there is no way to sustain this type of looping. A two teacher arrangement works best to ensure that looping is successful.

The next decision is what grade levels will loop. Ideally two teachers from consecutive grade levels will want to implement looping. The teachers just have to commit to completing the loop. It can be a stressful situation if after the first year a teacher decides not to loop or at the end of the second year a teacher decides to stay at the higher grade. Make sure that both teachers work out an agreement and put it in writing. Below is what a grade level with three sections could look like if two teachers decide to loop and the others decided not to:

Students from two of the sections move from first grade to second grade having a different teacher each year.
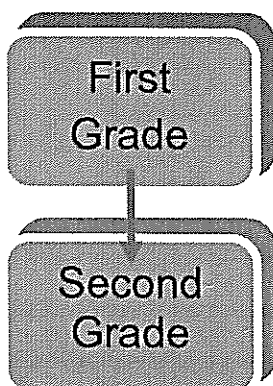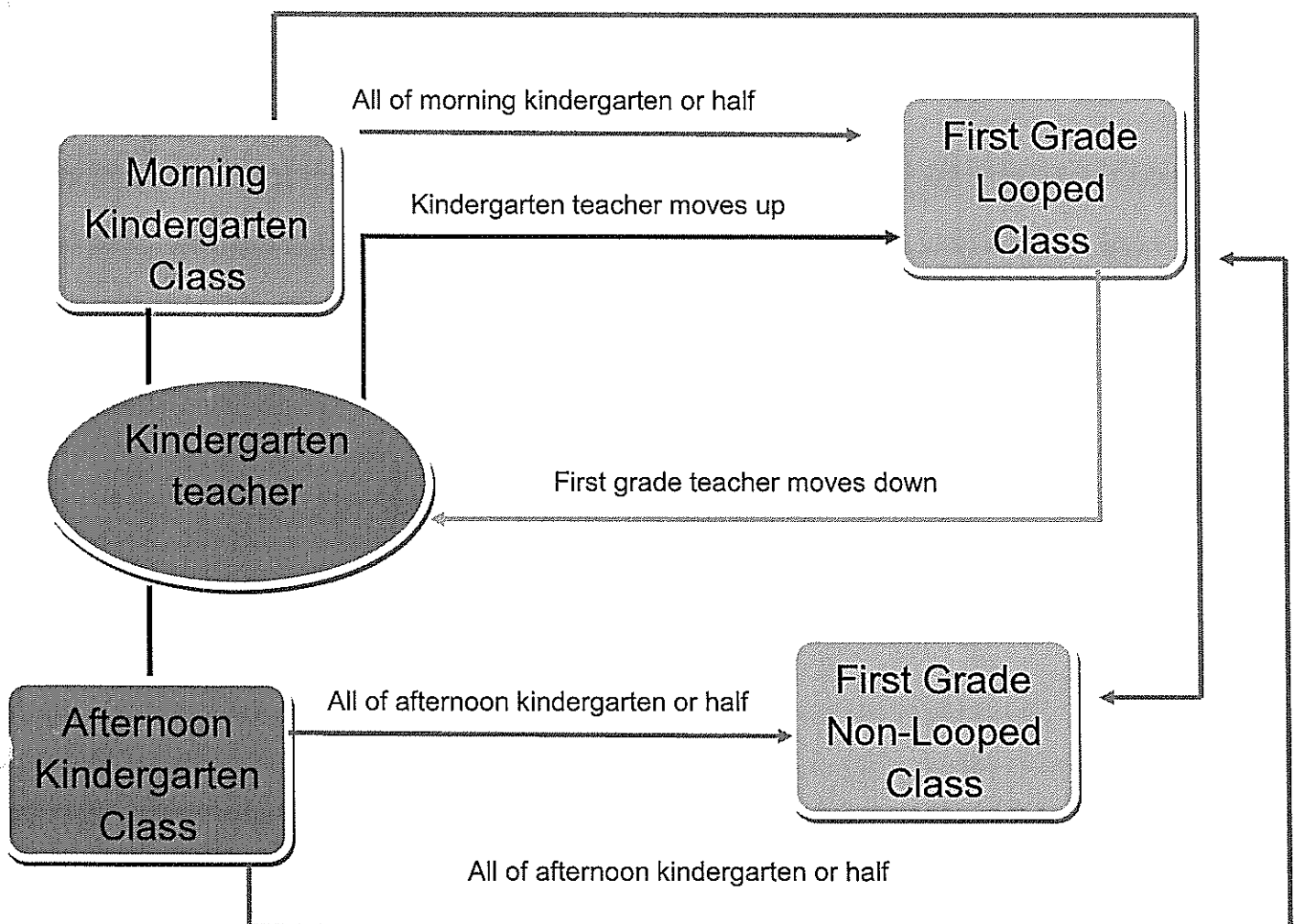
Students from the looped section move from first grade to second grade with the same teacher. The second grade teacher moves down to first grade.

First Grade

Second Grade

First Grade

Second Grade
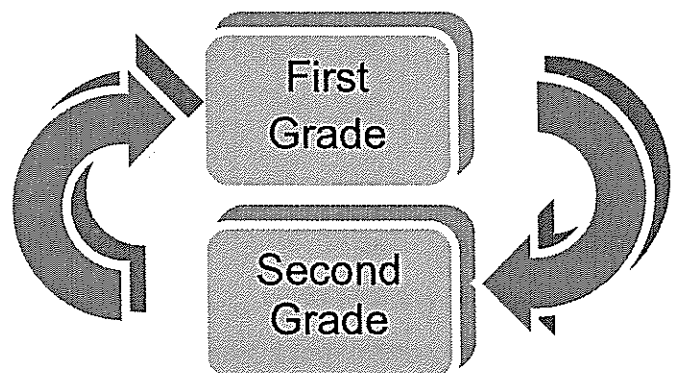
Looping can be done at any grade level. Kindergarten is the only grade that faces unique challenges. If your school has an all day kindergarten program then looping will look like any other grade level, a kindergarten teacher moves up and a first grade teacher moves down. Half-day kindergarten programs with a morning class and an afternoon class need to be addressed differently. The kindergarten teacher can take either all of the morning class, all of the afternoon class or a mix of both classes. The classes can be mixed two ways; the teacher can pick half of each class or randomly select half of the kindergarteners. Which every way is chosen make sure that the classroom is balanced. Below shows how it could look:

All of morning kindergarten or half

All of morning kindergarten or half

Morning Kindergarten Class

First Grade Looped Class

Kindergarten teacher moves up

Kindergarten teacher

First grade teacher moves down

All of afternoon kindergarten or half

Afternoon Kindergarten Class

First Grade Non-Looped Class

All of afternoon kindergarten or half

School wide looping will look different depending on the grade levels that are at the school. In a K-5 elementary school the looping sections could be Kindergarten to First grade, Second grade to Third grade, and Fourth grade to Fifth grade. In a K-6 elementary school the looping sections could be First grade to Second grade, Third grade to Fourth grade, and Fifth grade to Sixth grade. There are also many any other ways to arrange the looping sections. The school will have to find what will work best for them.

Classroom Composition

and

Student Selection

The composition of a looping classroom should look like any other classroom in the school. There should be a balance between the different populations in the school. The looped class should be balanced in terms of race, gender, cognitive abilities, socioeconomic and social-emotional factors. Special needs and gifted students can also be placed in a looping classroom, but avoid overloading the looped class.

Selecting students for a looping classroom can be as easy as a teacher deciding to move up with their students. If the students are moving into a looping class, make sure to select students that ensure that the class is balanced. As new students enroll at the school look at the balance of the classrooms before assigning the student to maintain classroom balance. If the school has guidelines for student selection make sure that both teachers and parents understand them and that they are in writing.

An important part of classroom composition and student selection is having an opting-out policy. This policy gives both teachers and parents the option of not having a student stay in the looping classroom. A different placement may be in the best interest of the student. Parents could also have negative attitude toward the teacher and could be unsatisfied with the arrangement. Before moving a student all efforts should be made to resolve the problems that arise.

Classrooms

Looping does not require that teachers move classrooms every year. Many teachers enjoy the fact that they get to stay in their rooms, while some do like to change rooms to emphasize to the students that they have moved up a grade. The teachers that stay in their rooms accomplish this by rearranging the classroom for the next year. Students can get involved in this by helping the teacher at the end of the first year design what their class should look like next year. Things to consider before making the choice to move or not include:

- Would it be a hardship to move all of your own materials?
- Does it matter if your grade level is not in the same area of the school as the rest of the grade level?
- Does the classroom meet the needs of your teaching style?
- Would moving take up valuable time and energy?
- Is there a strong reason to move or not?

Curriculum

There is no need to have a special curriculum for the looping classrooms. The teachers that have decided to loop can share the curriculum for each of their grade levels. It is nice for each to have their own set of curriculum for each grade level they will teach, but this is not necessary. It is a benefit for the teachers to have a clear understanding of where the students need to be at the end of the loop. The teachers in the loop should work together to ensure that the students are meeting these goals. This is particularly important in the second year of the loop, where the curriculum may be new to the teacher. Problems can be avoided when the looping teachers collaborate and share ideas. Teachers will need to familiarize themselves with the new grade levels state standards and district curriculum requirements. This is where collaboration between the teachers who have taught the grades is very important. They will be able to help each other to make the transition to a new grade happen smoothly.

After the First Year

The time after the first year and before the start of the second can be used to gather parent feedback, conduct program evaluations and teacher reflections. It is important to hear how the parents are feeling about the loop. This could be the time when parents chose to have their child op-out of the loop. It could also be a time to hear how much the parents are enjoying the loop and are looking forward to the next school year. A program evaluation can be useful in making changes based on the unforeseen problems that have arisen throughout the year. It is important to remain flexible when establishing looping classrooms. Changes may have to be made to fit the needs of students, parents and teachers. Teacher reflections after the first year are a time when teachers can see if they meet their goals, check their feelings about looping with their class and record things that they would do differently at the start of a new loop.

The summer after the first year and before the start of the year can be used by the looping teacher to extend learning and maintain the skills of their students. Many looping teachers find this time an important part of loop. Activities that can be assigned include:

Readings logs

Summer project

Parent/child activities

Writing letters to their teacher
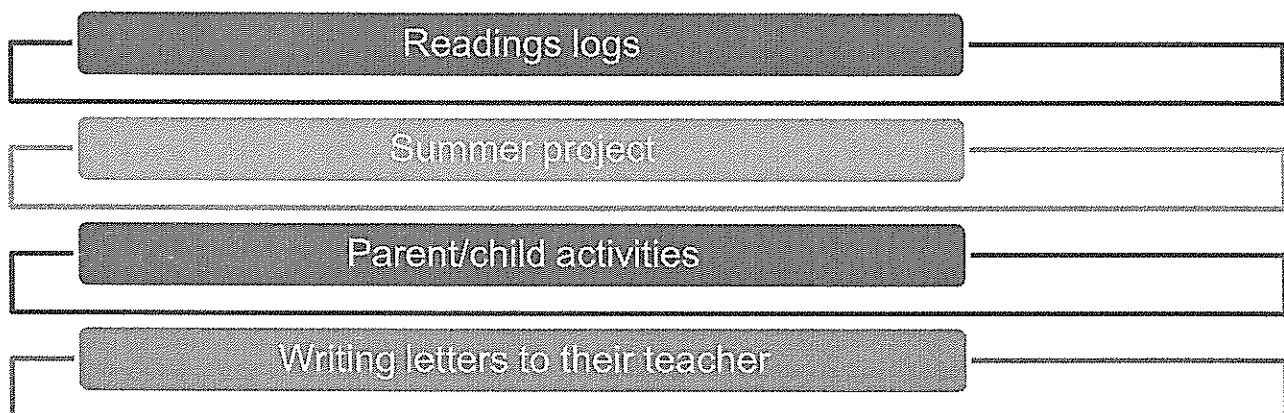
Things to Avoid

Fancy Names

- Giving the looping class a special name may make it sound elitist.

Overloading

- The looping class should look like any other class in the school.
- Do not put a large number of special needs or gifted students in a looping classroom

Personality Clash

- Be mindful that some students and parents might not mesh well with the teacher.

Streching the Curriculum

- Each grade level's curriculum needs to taught, avoid streching one years curriculum over two years.

Delaying Decisions

- If a student has a suspected learning disability, do not wait until the end of the loop to refer the student.

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The paper has shown that looping can improve the quality of the relationships that are made between teachers, students and parents. This is achieved by the teacher having more time to understand the needs of students and parents. Teachers benefit from the relationships by getting a deeper understanding of their students and having the support of parents. Students benefit from this strong relationship by being comfortable with their teacher and having a strong sense of belonging to a community. Parents benefit by having a strong connection to their child's teacher and the school.

The project is a guide to show administrators and teacher how to set up looping classrooms in their schools. The guide explains what looping is and what the reported benefits of looping are. The next section discusses how to get looping started in a school or classroom. It contains different models to show what the looping grades could look like. The guide also contains sections on classrooms, student assignment, curriculum and things to avoid while starting a looping model.

Conclusions

I learned that looping is a low cost effective educational model that has shown to build strong relationships with teacher, students and parents. The

research has shown me that students with a strong relationship with their teacher, classmates and school have fewer absences, discipline referrals and tend to have a more positive attitude toward school and learning. Teachers also benefit from looping by having to spend less time reviewing and assessing students at the beginning of the year. Teachers in a loop know the strengths and weakness of their students and have the time they need to ensure that every student gets what they require. What I found interesting is that the longer time frame of looping allows for parents to work on forming a partnership with the teacher. This partnership is important in that both parents and teachers can set goals for the child and can work with each other to ensure that the goals are met. Parents also report feeling more connected to their child's teacher and are more willing to get involved with the school.

Recommendations

The recommendations for this project are that the Renton School District allows me to loop with a group of students. This would let me observe if I experience the reported benefits of looping. Future master's degree students could write a survey that could be given to looping students and parents to find if they also experience the reported benefits of looping. Future master's degree students could also find looping classrooms in the local area and present the survey to see if those teachers, students and parents report the same findings.

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