Spring 2007

# Advantages of Looping at the Elementary Level

Laurie K. Rhoads
*Regis University*

**Regis University**
School for Professional Studies Graduate Programs
**Final Project/Thesis**

# Disclaimer

# ADVANTAGES OF LOOPING AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

by

Laurie K. Rhoads

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

REGIS UNIVERSITY

April, 2007

ABSTRACT

Advantages of Looping at the Elementary Level

Recently, looping has been getting attention from educators and educational reformers as a low cost, easily implemented way to improve education. In this project, the author created an inservice presentation designed as an introduction to the practice of looping at the elementary level. The target audience was elementary teachers and administrators. The presentation provided a brief history of the practice of looping, the theory behind the practice, a synthesis of the benefits and possible challenges of looping, and finally, several tips and considerations for the implementation of looping.

TABLE OF CONTENTS


Chapter Page

1. INTRODUCTION . . . . . 1
   Statement of the Problem . . . . . 1
   Purpose of the Project . . . . . 2
   Chapter Summary . . . . . 2

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE . . . . . 3
   Definition and History of Looping . . . . . 3
   Waldorf Education Model . . . . . 5
   Benefits of Looping . . . . . 7
      Importance of Longer Term Relationships for Children . . . . . 7
      Experiences of Students . . . . . 9
      Experiences of Teachers and Schools . . . . . 11
      Experiences of Parents . . . . . 14
   Cautions About Looping . . . . . 15
   Implementation of Looping . . . . . 17
   Future Research . . . . . 20
   Chapter Summary . . . . . 20

3. METHOD . . . . . 22
   Target Audience . . . . . 22
   Procedures . . . . . 22
   Goals of the Applied Project . . . . . 22
   Peer Assessment . . . . . 23
   Chapter Summary . . . . . 23

4. RESULTS . . . . . 24
   Inservice Presentation . . . . . 24
   Chapter Summary . . . . . 50

5. DISCUSSION . . . . . 51
   Assessment of the Project . . . . . 51
   Limitations of the Project . . . . . 52
   Recommendations . . . . . 53
   Project Summary . . . . . 54

REFERENCES . . . . . 56

APPENDICES
A. Inservice Handout Packet . . . . . 59
B. Publisher Permission . . . . . 68

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the current emphasis on student achievement as measured by standardized tests, it is necessary for educators to find ways to build relationships with their students. The most effective teachers have good rapport with their students and know which methods and strategies will work with which students. One way that teachers are finding time to get to know their students better is the practice of looping, when one teacher stays with the same group of students for 2 or more consecutive years (Berlin, 1996). Although there is still a need for more quantitative research on the practice of looping, the literature shows that the use of looping can have many positive impacts on the classroom environment, not only for students and teachers, but for parents as well. There can be disadvantages to the use of looping, but with careful implementation, many of these disadvantages can be avoided and/or mitigated.

### Statement of the Problem

The current emphasis on standards and assessment in public education has detracted from the more humane side of schooling. Frequently, it seems that students are viewed as test subjects rather than as social beings. However, the relationship and rapport between teachers and students is critical to effective teaching and learning. In addition to the de-emphasis of human relationships in favor of testing, many students experience extreme instability in their home lives. For these students, a nurturing, stable

school environment is even more important. One way to re-emphasize relationships and establish a stable classroom community is the use of looping.

## Purpose of the Project

In the past several years, many administrators and educators have demonstrated interest in the practice of looping, particularly as a means to develop a stronger sense of community in the classroom. The purpose of this project was to compile and synthesize the research on the theory and best practices for looping at the elementary level. This author developed an inservice designed as an introductory presentation to administrators and educators about looping and the steps necessary to implement looping at the elementary level.

## Chapter Summary

In summary, it is this researcher's opinion that looping can have many positive impacts, with few or no disadvantages, when carefully implemented at the elementary level. In Chapter 2, this researcher will present a Review of Literature on looping. This review will cover the history of looping and a summary of its benefits as well as its possible disadvantages. This researcher will present several tips for implementation and, also, will point out some areas for future research. In Chapter 3, Method, this researcher will outline the procedures, goals, and intended audience for this project.

# Chapter 2

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this project was to develop an inservice to introduce elementary level faculty members to the concept of looping. The inservice provided information about best practices for looping and, also, this author recommended steps for implementation. Currently, the educational climate is heavily focused on standards and assessment. In such a climate, it becomes difficult to practice a holistic approach to education, one that honors the social and emotional, as well as the academic aspects of the children. As Kelly et al. (1998) stated, "Enhancing a climate that fosters the development of the whole child continues to be a challenge for educators" (p. 62). Although much of the support for the practice comes from anecdotal evidence rather than quantitative data, one possible solution to the aforementioned dilemma is to extend the student/teacher relationship beyond the traditional 1 year of schooling through the implementation of looping.

### Definition and History of Looping

Although not referred to as such at the time, looping dates back to the one room schoolhouse of the past (Looping: Two Years with the Same Class, 1998). Berlin (1996) cited Grant (n.d.) who coined the term, looping, which describes the educational practice when one teacher stays with the same group of students for 2 or more consecutive years. Also, in the literature, looping has been termed: (a) multiyear grouping/placement; (b)

teacher/student progression; (c) the 20 month classroom (Berlin); (d) persistence grouping (Bellis, 1999); and (e) continuous learning (Roberts, 2001).

The idea of looping dates back to the one room schoolhouse and, also, it has roots in *family grouping*, which is used in elementary schools in the United Kingdom (Bellis, 1999). The one room schoolhouse of early American education combined both multiage grouping (i.e., several different grade levels in the same classroom) and multiyear grouping (i.e., looping). Looping is in use more frequently in other countries, such as Italy, Israel, Japan, and Germany (Roberts, 2001). According to Grant, Johnson, and Richardson (1996), looping is utilized in Japan and Israel at the elementary level as well as at the secondary level. For instance, in the secondary schools in those countries, the same teacher will teach all levels of mathematics or science to the same group of students.

Elliott and Capp (2003) noted that, "Only in the early 20th century did the idea of rigid classes and grade levels begin to hold students into compartments until their social group was ready to advance as a unit" (p. 34). However, in a 1913 memorandum, an Officer of Education from the United States Department of Education raised the question of whether looping, referred to in this case as *Teacher Rotation*, would be more effective with students, particularly in urban settings (Grant et al., 1996). The Officer noted several advantages to the method now referred to as looping: (a) the teacher knows the children better and is able to build on previous learning in the subsequent years after the first, (b) time is saved at the beginning of the second year because students are already conditioned to the rules of the classroom, and (c) parents have a better understanding of

the teacher and his or her methods. These same advantages, as well as several others, have resurfaced in the educational community today.

Recently, educational reformers, who are always looking for ways to improve education, have given more attention to looping as a low cost, easily implemented way to improve education (Looping: Two years with the same class, 1998). Potentially, the use of looping can positively impact students both academically and socially (Burke, 1997). Although there are no official numbers on teachers, who are involved in looping classrooms in the U.S., it is estimated to be in the thousands (Looping: Two Year with the Same Class).

In general, looping is not adopted school wide, but rather by a few teachers who decide to give it a try, usually in the lower grades (Jacobson, 1997). Although certainly not the norm, the entire school district staff, in Attleboro, Massachusetts, implemented looping for all students, Grades 1-8 (Roberts, 2001). Looping can be used at any grade level, but in the U.S., it is most common at the elementary and middle school grades (Gaustad, 1998). The number of years that a teacher stays with the same group of students may vary from situation to situation but, most frequently, the amount of time is 2 years (LAB at Brown University, 1997).

## Waldorf Education Model

Looping, although not referred to by that name in the literature about Waldorf schools, is an essential part of the Waldorf model (Uhrmacher, 1997). Since the foundation of Waldorf schools, the basis of the model has been that the same teacher continues with the same group of students from first through eighth grade. In 1919,

Austrian educator Rudolf Steiner founded the first Waldorf School, which was designed for the education of the children of Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory workers in Germany (Grant et al., 1996). Although the Waldorf schools began in Germany, they can be found all over the world today, including the U.S. (Uhrmacher).

Uhrmacher (1997) noted that Waldorf schooling is based on an anthroposophical view of the world. In this way of thinking, "individuals are destined to meet certain others and in these non-chance meetings they learn important lessons from their interactions" (pp. 3-4). Therefore, according to anthroposophy, a group of students and their teacher must work out difficult situations in order to develop themselves. The extended time that they are afforded by looping allows them to do so more effectively and necessitates that they do so in order to continue together.

In an effort to fill some of the void in the quantitative research for Waldorf education, Schieffer and Busse (2001) compared the academic achievement of students in a public Waldorf school and a traditional public school, both in the same urban area. The results of the study showed that, over 2 years, minority students of low socioeconomic status (SES) scored higher on the statewide achievement test in all subjects in comparison to their counterparts at a traditional public school. The authors of the study attributed these higher achievement levels, at least in part, to the closer relationship that the Waldorf teachers had with their students as a result of multiple years together.

However, the Schieffer and Busse (2001) study was limited by several factors: (a) the sample size at the comparison school was very small for the first year of the study; (b) the validity data for the statewide achievement test were not available; (c) there was a

possibility that, to begin with, the students at the Waldorf school had higher aptitudes, and most importantly; (d) there were no data in regard the pedagogical methods used at the comparison school. Further research is needed for the results of this study to be generalizeable.

## Benefits of Looping

According to Roberts (2001), "looping has been known to strengthen student-teacher bonds, improve test scores, expand time for instruction, increase parent participation, and reduce behavioral problems and placements in special education programs" (p. 1). Despite these claims, there has been very little quantitative research on the subject. Much of the available information on looping is anecdotal in nature, and much more research is needed to quantify the impact of longer term relationships, in the form of looping, on students, teachers, schools, and parents.

### *Importance of Longer Term Relationships for Children*

As Grant et al. (1996) stated, "Relationship—that of teacher to student, to the parents, to other teachers, and to the curriculum—is what gives looping its power" (p. 16). Although in this day and age, the administrators of a public school would be unlikely to keep a teacher with the same group of students for 8 years as is the case in Waldorf schools, in schools where looping is utilized, there are longer term relationships between students and teachers than the traditional 1 school year together.

Jim Grant, as quoted in Looping: Two Years with the Same Class (1998), said, "As adults we value long-term relationships built on trust. We should allow our kids to do the same" (p. 2). As Burke (1996) noted, typically, parents do not send their children

to a new pediatrician every year because they realize that the compiled body of knowledge that the doctor has about their child will most likely prove to be more beneficial than switching to a new doctor. Burke argued that similar logic should be followed in education, that is, a teacher who knows more about a child through multiple years in the classroom together will be more effective in the education of that child. As Ellliott and Capp (2003) wrote, "Building relationships with students is the heart of multi-year teaching, and the soul is knowing each of the student's needs based on information that has been gathered over a longer period of time" (p. 36). Roberts (2001) quoted elementary teacher, Tubiello, who stated that, "For young children, looping is ideal. They bond with you. They're more willing to take risks because they know you. They are willing to try something and make a mistake" (p. 3).

In their qualitative study of German elementary schools, Zahorik and Dichanz (1994) found that the long term relationships that are established in looping classrooms stimulate "thinking, risk-taking, and involvement" (p. 75). Also, Payne (1998, as cited in Forsten, Grant, & Richardson, 1999) found that a long term relationship with teachers had a positive impact on children's sense of well-being. According to Berlin (1996), the longer term relationship between a looping teacher and his or her students creates trust and a family feeling in the classroom; thus, students can become more self-confident and more cooperative with each other.

According to Wynne and Walberg (1994), there should be more emphasis on group persistence and cohesion in U.S. education, which has been shown to positively influence a the members of a group. The authors noted the recent increase in use of

cooperative learning as a step in the right direction, but claimed that the benefits are sometimes minimized due to the short time span that cooperative groups persist. The authors asserted that, "Measures such as reducing class size or using cooperative learning in brief, transitory groups are insufficient to generate maximum cohesion. Continuity is also a crucial factor" (p. 2). Wynne and Walberg found that teachers in schools in other countries tended to emphasize the persistence of groups more than their U.S. counterparts, often through looping.

Little and Little (2001) asserted support for looping, based on the idea of Maslow's (1943, as cited in Little &Little) Hierarchy of Needs, which is based on the theory that, when humans' more basic needs are met, they are able to focus on higher level needs. According to Little and Little, a looping environment can provide the security and safety that allows students to attain the higher level of social needs. Once students come to see themselves as part of the group, they are more likely to develop self-esteem and view themselves as an important part of the group, which is essential for children. As Little and Little noted, "Humans are social beings. The need to establish meaningful relationships with others is critical to the development of the individual" (p. 11).

### *Experiences of Students*

Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1997, as cited in Burke, 1997) conducted one of the few empirical studies of the impact of looping on academic achievement. Their study of Project F.A.S.T., a joint venture between Cleveland State University and East Cleveland Schools, produced quantitative support for looping. Students involved in the

program, which included looping as one of its fundamental components, achieved higher scores in both reading and mathematics on standardized tests, even when students in both the F.A.S.T. program and the comparison students were taught by the same teacher.

In another study on the impact of looping on academic achievement, Krogmann and Van Sant (2000), conducted an action research study at their school as looping was implemented for the first time with a group of first grade students who looped with their teacher to second grade. For their project, Krogmann and Van Sant compared test scores for the looping class and a comparison nonlooping class. Krogmann and Van Sant found that, at the middle of the second year, students in the looping class had improved their test scores more than their counterparts in the nonlooping classroom.

Although there is relatively little empirical evidence for the impact of looping on academic performance and achievement, educators who have practiced looping tend to tout its social benefits even more than its academic benefits (Jacobson, 1997). As Little and Little (2001) noted, "Most schools that practice looping find test scores are at or above the expected level, but the primary purposes for looping are its psychological effects of continuity and stability, not as a means by which test scores will increase" (pp. 24-25). However, according to Bellis (1999), "The underlying belief is that schools can be more successful academically if the children are more secure emotionally" (p. 70).

Often, shy students benefit from looping because, as they become more comfortable with their peers, they are more willing to speak out and take risks (Jacobson, 1997; Jacoby, 1994). Also, Little and Little (2001) noted that there is less competition among students in looping classrooms and more of a familial, cooperative atmosphere.

Also, according to Haslinger, Kelly, and O'Lare (1996), looping can provide an important support for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The increased level of comfort that these students feel with a looping teacher and peers helps to boost their self-confidence and, therefore, their willingness to practice their new language skills.

The stability of the looping classroom appears to result in less anxiety for both adults and children during the subsequent years after the first (Berlin, 1996). This stability may be particularly important for children and families who face instability outside of school (e.g., homeless families; Haslinger et al., 1996). According to Wetzel (1990, as cited in Bellis, 1999), today, families are less stable than those after World War II. There is less stability due to the fact that families move more often, and there is more change in family structure than ever before (Chapman, 1999).

In their qualitative study of a looping first/second grade class, Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) found that all of the students involved in the looping class had positive experiences. However, there is a need for more quantitative data on students' attitudes toward looping.

### *Experiences of Teachers and Schools*

In a study conducted at the middle school level, George (1996, as cited in Jacobson, 1997) found that teachers responded very positively toward looping. These teachers reported improved student behavior as well as improved performance for low achieving students. Also, the teachers maintained that looping allowed them the opportunity to more effectively build on students' strengths. According to Burke (1996), teachers felt more job satisfaction as a result of looping.

Berlin (1996) quoted a former principal who noted that the most important benefit to looping is increased time on task. For the second and any subsequent years of looping, a teacher is able to begin teaching more quickly at the beginning of the year, due to a variety of factors, including knowledge of what students have already mastered (Elliott & Capp, 2003). In their action research project, Krogmann and Van Sant (2000) compared the amount of time spent on routines and procedures at the beginning of the second year for both the looping and nonlooping classrooms. They found that the looping teacher spent substantially less time on routines and procedures due to the fact that her students were already familiar with both and, therefore, the looping teacher was able to start teaching academic content sooner than the nonlooping teacher.

Zahorik and Dichanz (1994) studied elementary schools in Germany, where heterogeneous groups of students are looped with the same teacher from Grades 1-4. They found that the German teachers were able to come to know the students better and, also, were able to build upon students' background knowledge more effectively because of the looping environment. In addition, they found that the teachers were knowledgeable about other aspects of their students, such as preferred learning styles, emotional maturity, and social skills, and thus better able to provide the right support to individual students. The looping environment appeared to promote the social construction of knowledge (i.e., the collective aids individuals in clarification of understanding).

Administrators at the Attleboro School District, in which all teachers in Grades 1-8 loop, compared prelooping and postlooping data and found positive effects that they

attributed, at least in part, to the looping itself (Roberts, 2001). The results from the comparison showed that: (a) retention rates for students in Grades 2-8 decreased by 43%; (b) special education referrals had decreased by over 55%; and (c) discipline issues, including suspensions, had declined as well. At the same time, attendance rates for both students and teachers had improved.

The practice of looping allows the teacher to become very familiar with students' strengths and weaknesses and, thus, he or she can design lessons and choose the best methods to reach individual students (Haslinger et al., 1996). Jacoby (1994) noted from personal experience in a looping classroom that she "was able to build on known foundations and utilize the children's strengths and talents more than I was ever able to before" (p. 59).

In general, teachers find that student behavior is more positive in the second year of looping than in traditional classrooms (Little & Little, 2001). Grant et al. (1996) cited the fact that, often, children with the most severe behavior problems are those who are most in need of consistency and continuity; thus, they are well suited for a looping environment.

Black (2000) found that administrators noticed positive changes in their schools as a result of looping. One principal claimed that, since teachers knew that they would have another year with their students, they felt less pressure to cram everything from the curricula into 1 year. The decrease in pressure led to calmer classroom environments. This effect could be especially important for students who might be considered for retention. Also, Jacobson claimed that it can be a positive and effective alternative to

retention (Jacobson, 1997). If there is a concern about progress in the first year, a looping teacher has more flexibility in getting that student to the point where he or she should be by the end of 2 or more years together.

In interviews with teachers, Black (2000) found that the majority of teachers who had looped found it preferable to teaching just one grade level. In fact, the teachers who experienced looping were vocal supporters of the practice and encouraged other teachers in their schools to try it.

### *Experiences of Parents*

Looping has been shown to strengthen the relationships between teachers and parents. As Little and Dacus (1999) wrote, "Parent-teacher relationships have improved so much that many parents have requested a third year with the same teacher" (p. 44).

Little and Little (2001) found that parents of children in looping classrooms felt more comfortable and had better relationships with their children's teachers. One reason, that relationships among parents, teachers, and students may be better in a looping environment, is because everyone realizes that they will be together longer, and so they may invest more from the outset (Chapman, 1999).

In the Hampton, Mumford, and Bond study (1997, as cited in Burke, 1997), parents whose children participated in the F.A.S.T. program, which included looping, reported more positive feelings toward teachers and administrators. The parents felt more respected by teachers, more confident in their abilities, and more likely to approach the school for help with their children.

Although Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) did not find that parents believed that academic grades would improve as a result of looping, the same parents reported that the teachers would better understand students' strengths and weaknesses as a result of the practice. Also, the parents in the study reported that they believed that looping would allow their children "more time to be successful in school" (p. 4).

In their study, Nichols and Nichols (2001) compared the attitudes of parents of students who looped with the attitudes of parents who had little or no experience with looping. The findings from the study showed that parents whose children had more than 1 year of looping experience reported significantly ($p < .05$) more positive attitudes in regard to: (a) their child's school and teacher, (b) their perceptions of student motivation, and (c) their perceptions of student attitudes toward school.

## Cautions About Looping

Although, generally, longer term relationships are considered to have positive effects, there are exceptions. As Gaustad (1998) noted:

> Longer contact can amplify the negative as well as the positive aspects of relationships. The greatest concern of parents is that their child might spend two years with an ineffective teacher. Time can also exacerbate problems with student-teacher personality clashes, unreasonably demanding parents, problematic mixtures of students, and specific weaknesses of a generally good teacher. (p. 4)

The use of looping has been shown to foster a more familial atmosphere in the classroom; however, sometimes this attitude is not always positive. According to Bellis (1999), "the research also discloses that increased familiarity has been known to breed negative siblinglike behaviors between classmates as well as other interpersonal conflicts" (p. 71).

Sometimes, personality conflicts among students emerge over time and, therefore, are not evident within the first year of the looping environment (Chapman, 1999).

Secondly, if part of the purpose of looping is to develop stronger bonds between teachers and students, some critics, as well as parents and teachers in support of the practice, worry that breaking that bond will be even more painful for children after multiple years with the same peers and teacher (Looping: Two Years with the Same Class, 1998). However, anecdotal accounts have shown that the students involved in looping classrooms handled the postloop transition smoothly

Although, in general, fewer special education referrals are considered to be a positive impact of looping, one major problem is that a looping teacher could overlook symptoms of a learning disability for several years and, thus, conceivably miss an important period for intervention (Bellis, 1999). This could be a tremendous disadvantage for the student in question.

According to Vann (1997), another disadvantage to looping is that a looping teacher has to master a new curriculum. This can be time consuming for the teacher and, also, could cause the teacher to be less effective at instruction in the new curriculum in the first year, if no additional materials or time are offered (Grant et al., 1996).

Another possible issue with looping is that many teachers are gifted in certain subjects while they may lack in others (Vann, 1997). If students have the same teacher for multiple years and that teacher is weak in one or more areas, the students may miss out on valuable instruction in the teacher's weak subject. McAteer (2001) warned that if "a teacher's area of weakness mirrors a child's, looping is a dead end" (p. 3). Wynne and

Walberg (1994) noted that a common concern among parents is that their child would be placed with a less effective teacher for multiple years.

Little and Dacus (1999) observed that, when a new student arrives in the second year of a looping situation, it can be awkward for the new child since all of the other students know each other and the routines of the classroom very well. In their qualitative study of looping, Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) found that parents of children, who entered the classroom as new students in the second year of a looping environment, reported that, initially, their children found it difficult to adjust. Also, if a looping teacher has treated the curriculum as a 2 year plan rather than as 2 discreet years of instruction, a student, who arrives in the second year, may miss out on important concepts, and a student that exits from the second year and moves to another classroom may miss important concepts in the process (Vann, 1997).

## Implementation of Looping

Looping is a low cost reform that, often, starts at the grassroots, with classroom teachers (Black, 2000). As with any educational reform, there are potential pitfalls in looping. However, with proper planning and implementation, many of the pitfalls can be minimized (Grant et al., 1996).

Little and Little (2001) emphasized that there should be frank discussion among teachers and administrators about contingency plans and all possible scenarios before the implementation of looping. These authors suggested that looping team members discuss and even draw up agreements in regard to: (a) whether materials will be shared, (b) whether the teachers will change classrooms, (c) how transfers in the second year will be

handled, and (d) what would happen if one teacher changed his or her mind about looping at the end of the first year.

"In a multi-year assignment, dealing with personality clashes immediately and with total commitment is a priority" (LAB at Brown University, 1997, p. 10). However, O'Neill (2004) and Vann (1997) agreed that, in certain cases, it may become necessary, after exhausting all avenues of working out the conflict, for certain students to be transferred to a different class in the second year. These experts maintained that looping should be optional for all parties concerned, so that if there are irremediable personality conflicts or other issues, there is always a solution. As Vann noted, "Despite best efforts to match teaching styles with children's learning styles, there will always be mismatches. Continuing those mismatches a second year is unfair to both teacher and child" (p. 2).

Although parents might be concerned about their child being in the classroom with a less effective teacher for more than 1 year, Wynne and Walberg (1994) asserted that the use of looping may promote quality control. Whereas parents may be willing to tolerate a poor teacher for 1 school year, they would be much less likely to do so for 2 or more years. Roberts (2001) cited Grant, Director of the Society for Developmental Education, who stated that looping "usually attracts a school's most energetic teachers and gives them an opportunity to push the limits of their professional development" (p. 1).

Generally, teachers, who are weaker and have something to hide, will not volunteer to loop because of the extra time and planning that is necessary in a looping environment (Grant et al., 1996). Also, Simel (1998, as cited in Gaustad, 1998)

suggested that not only should teachers become confident with the curriculum for 1 year before they address the second year.

According to Little and Little (2001), the "single most important factor in the success of the looping classroom is the commitment of the teacher" (p. 14). Vann (1997) reported that teachers, who are committed to looping, may create a Hawthorne effect (i.e., when people believe in something and want to work to make sure it succeeds, it usually does). Therefore, teachers should never be forced into looping, and once they volunteer to implement looping, they should be provided with sufficient support in terms of extra planning, materials, and training, if necessary (Grant et al., 1996). Another suggestion is to match newer teachers with veterans and encourage good cooperation between the two teachers who will loop as a team.

Teachers of looped classrooms should strive to find ways to keep the students connected during summer vacations, when they are apart, whether through periodic meetings or projects (Bellis, 1999). Forsten et al. (1999) suggested a "summer bridge" (p. 16) of activities that reinforce previous learning and/or preview what will come in the next year.

Finally, Little and Little (2001) suggested that surveys be administered to teachers, students, and parents. Responses from these surveys can provide another level of quality control to the implementation of looping and allow administrators and teachers to make adjustments as necessary.

## Future Research

As mentioned throughout this chapter, there is a need for more empirical studies on the practice of looping. Looping is a low cost reform that often starts at the grassroots, with classroom teachers (Black, 2000). Because of that fact, it would be appropriate for teachers and schools to conduct action research as they implement looping.

This author would like to see future research on the optimal number of years for looping at the elementary level. In their qualitative study of looping, Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) found that, although parents responded favorably to looping, the majority of those parents were not interested in a looping environment that lasted for 3 years.

Nichols and Nichols (2001) pinpointed several areas for future research on looping. The first area that the authors mentioned was the "impact of marital and SES status as predictors of favorable attitudes toward the school environment" (p. 32). Also, Nichols and Nichols suggested further research into the often touted, but as of yet unquantified, sense of community that develops in looping classrooms, and the benefits that come from a sense of community. Finally, those authors suggested a longitudinal study in order to measure the impact of looping on both behavior and achievement, as well as teacher attitudes.

## Chapter Summary

Although there is a dearth of quantitative research on the impact of looping, this researcher agrees with Chapman (1999) that "common sense . . . tell[s] us that caring

communities in which children feel validated are beneficial" (p. 80). The literature on looping strongly supports the practice, although as mentioned previously, much of the support is not empirically based. There are potential pitfalls in looping, but supporters claim that the benefits greatly outweigh the disadvantages (McAteer, 2001) and that, through careful implementation and ongoing monitoring, these pitfalls can be avoided (Grant et al., 1996). In Chapter 3, this researcher will describe the method, target audience, procedures, and goals for this applied project.

# Chapter 3

# METHOD

The purpose of this project was to develop an inservice for elementary administrators and educators about the practice of looping, when one teacher stays with the same group of students for more than 1 year. The inservice presentation was in the form of a PowerPoint presentation and outlined the main advantages and disadvantages of looping, as well as some guidelines and steps for implementation. This researcher has observed the benefits of cultivating close relationships with both students and parents, and therefore, wanted to learn more about the effects of looping classrooms, in which teachers and students are allowed more time to get to know one another.

## Target Audience

This project was designed as an introductory presentation about looping for elementary administrators and educators, with the purpose of developing interest among the staff for further action. The staff of schools and/or districts that might be interested in learning more about looping would be interested in this project, as it provided a synthesis of the research, both quantitative and qualitative, on the practice.

## Goals and Procedures

The goal of this project was to provide interested elementary administrators and educators with an introduction to the practice of looping. The inservice presentation included a brief review of the available research on looping, and although it primarily

focused on the benefits, it also outlined some of the potential challenges and pitfalls of looping, and offered some solutions to avoid the possible disadvantages. The presentation included handouts, as well a suggested bibliography for those interested in learning more about the topic.

## Peer Assessment

The introductory inservice on looping was presented in its entirety to several elementary level colleagues. These colleagues each received a copy of the PowerPoint slides as well as presentation handouts and were asked to critique the presentation. This researcher asked the colleagues for specific suggestions on parts of the presentation that needed more information and/or other improvements.

## Chapter Summary

Looping, at the elementary level, is one way in which teachers and students can come to know each other better and create a sense of community in the classroom. Through this project, this researcher synthesized the available research on looping into an inservice designed specifically as an introduction to the practice for elementary administrators and educators. In Chapter 4, this researcher included the PowerPoint presentation that was presented at the inservice, as well as the accompanying talking points and handouts. In Chapter 5, this researcher presented a discussion of the project and the colleagues' reviews.

# Chapter 4

# RESULTS

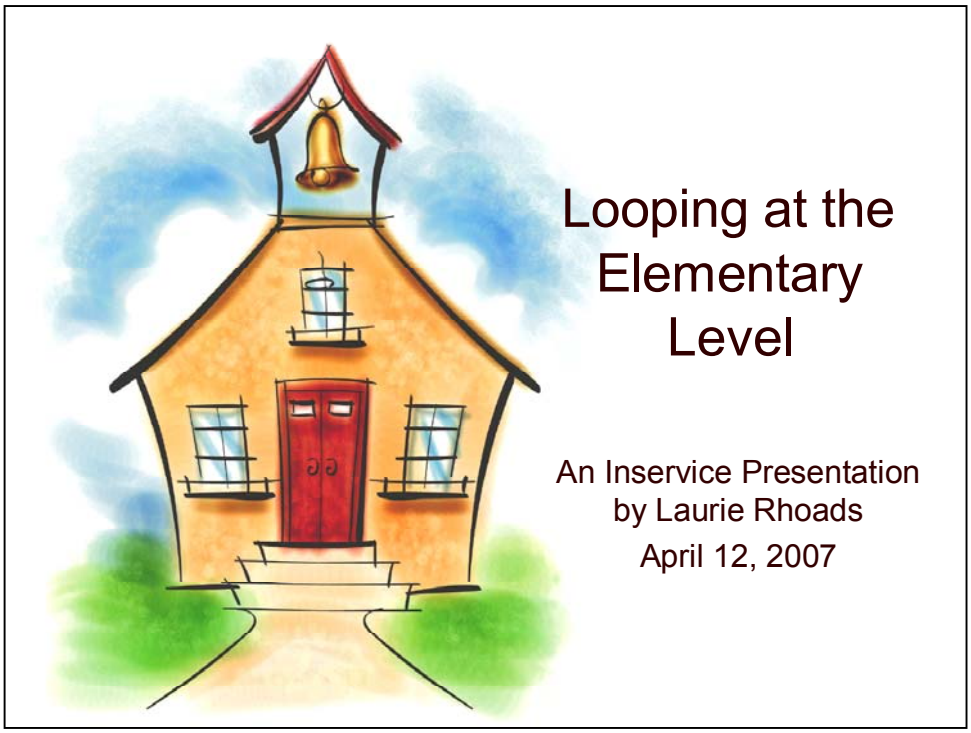
Looping is a fairly simple, low cost reform that has the potential to improve education at the elementary level by taking some of the emphasis away from standardized testing and returning it to the importance of human relationships and rapport between teachers and students. This inservice was designed as an introductory presentation about looping for elementary administrators and educators, with the purpose of developing interest for further action.

The goal of this inservice was to introduce elementary level teachers and administrators to the benefits of looping and to provide them with resources for further inquiry. The learning objectives for the participants of the inservice were to understand: (a) the definition, theory behind, and brief history of looping; (b) the potential benefits and pitfalls of looping; and (c) some suggestions and steps for implementation. It was this author's goal for those in attendance to consider the benefits of looping and for at least some of the participants to consider it further, for possible implementation at their schools.

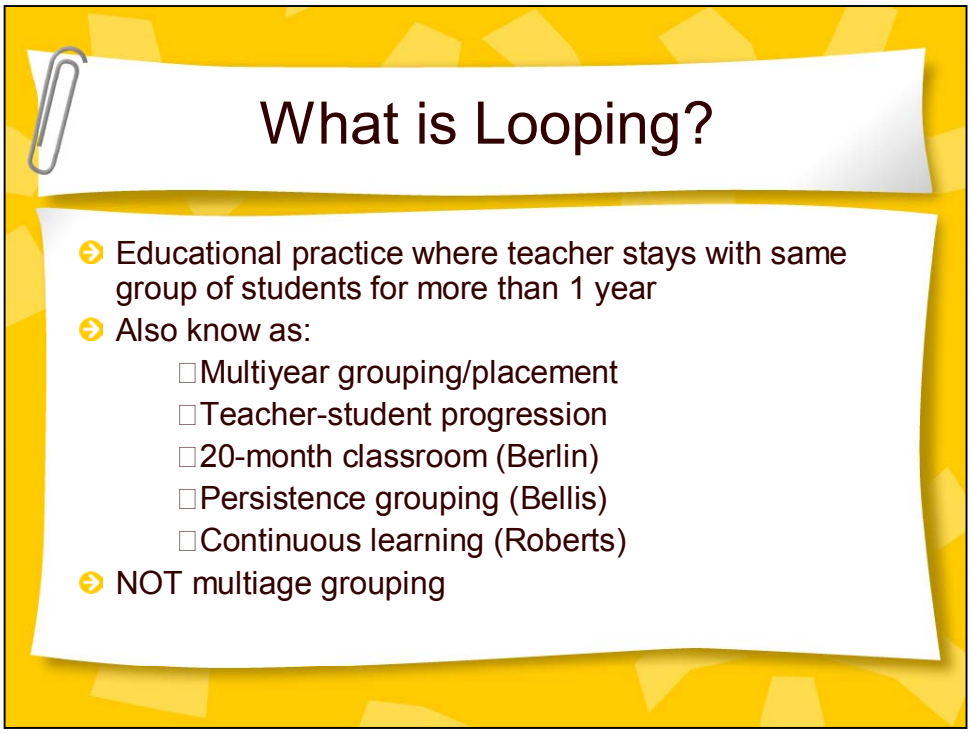
## Inservice Presentation

The inservice was presented using a PowerPoint slide show. As participants arrived and signed in, they received name tags and one handout packet per person. A copy of the handout packet is available in Appendix A. Pens for note taking were

provided on the sign in table. The room was set up with a large screen and an LCD projector and the first slide was projected as the participants entered the room. There was a flip chart at the front of the room with markers. The following are the slides that were presented during the inservice, with their accompanying commentary.




Welcome and thank you for coming to this inservice. My name is Laurie Rhoads and I will be your presenter today. The title of today's inservice is "Looping at the Elementary Level." This presentation has been designed as an introduction to looping for elementary educators and the objectives for today are: first, to go over the definition, theory behind, and brief history of looping; second, to discuss the potential benefits and pitfalls of looping; and third to provide some suggestions and steps for implementation. Your handout packet includes all of the slides in this presentation with space to take notes if you wish to do so. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).



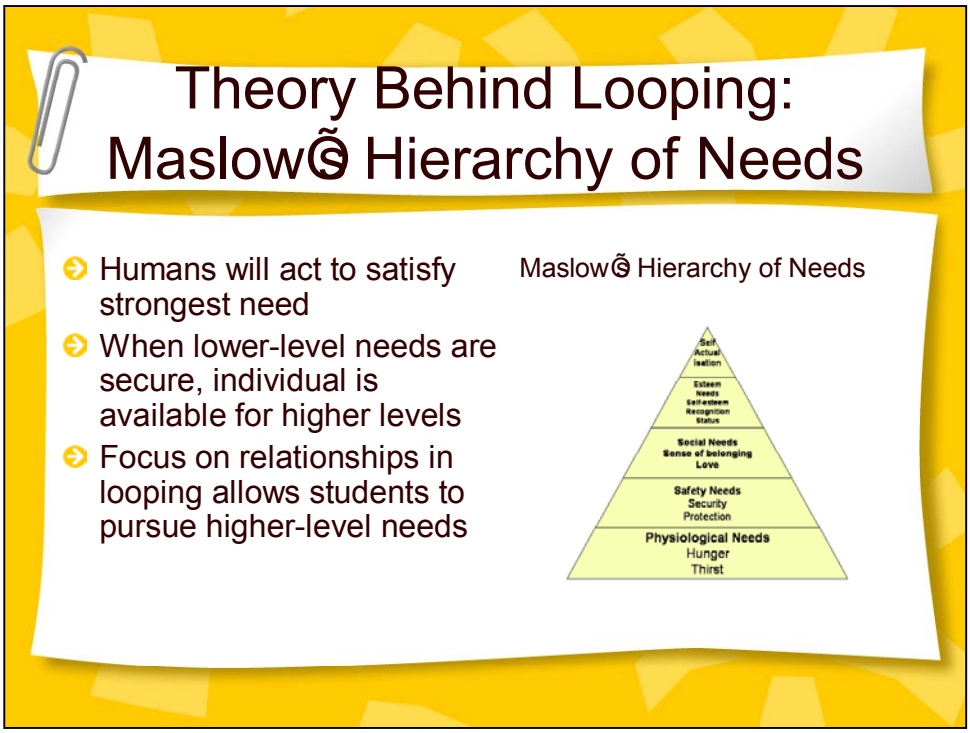

The first question of the day is: "What exactly *is* looping?" Looping, though not always referred to by that term, is the educational practice where a teacher stays with the same group of students for more than one year. In its current incarnation in the United States, the looping group most commonly stays together for 2 years, although it can be more. At some schools, it may be that just two teachers have decided that they would like to loop for 2 years and have presented the possibility to the administration. The two teachers are then considered to be a looping team. When the first teacher finishes the 2 year loop, she goes back down to the lower grade level to begin with a new group of students.

The term "looping" was coined by Jim Grant, Director of the Society for Developmental Education, who is probably the most well-known advocate of looping.

In the literature, looping has also been referred to as: (a) multiyear grouping/placement, (b) teacher-student progression, (c) the 20-month classroom, (d) persistence grouping, and (d) continuous learning.

Looping is NOT to be confused with multiage grouping. In multiage grouping, students from two or more grade levels are taught within the same classroom, whereas in looping, the students are all the same grade level. It is interesting to note, however, that many advocates of looping, such as Jim Grant and his colleagues, are also supporters of the multiage arrangement.

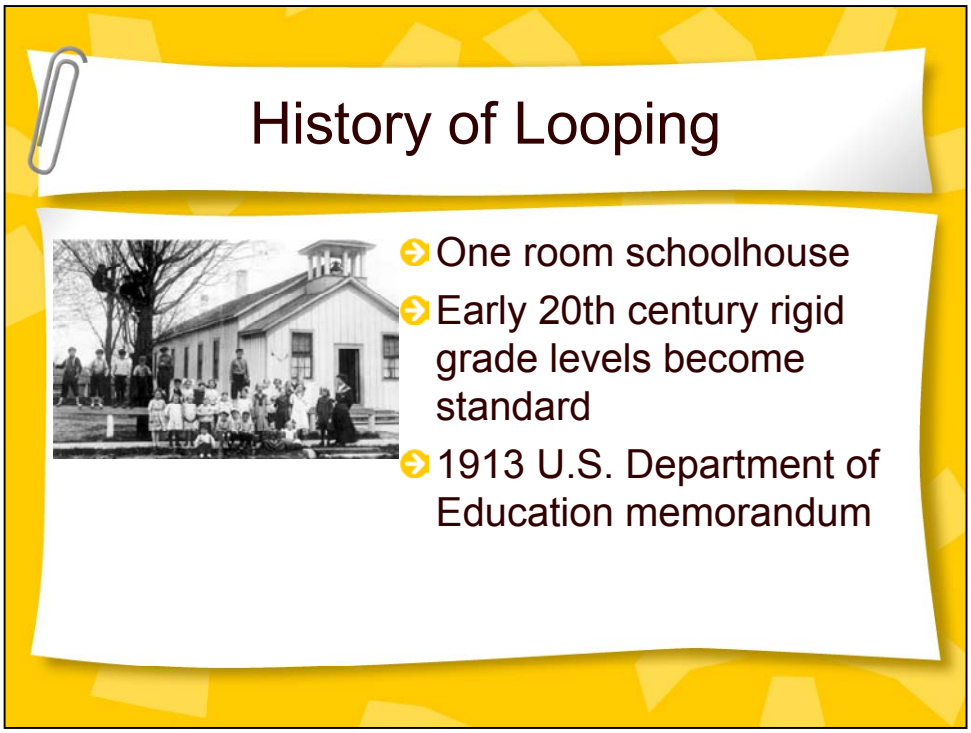
I would like to get a gauge of everyone's exposure to looping. Please raise your hand if you have ever been involved in looping in any capacity—either as a student, teacher, administrator, or parent. (If there are no hands, move directly on to the next slide. If there are hands raised, allow time to call on each person and ask him/her to share the capacity in which he/she was involved in looping and for how long. Invite these people to share their insights about looping as the presentation progresses. Presenter clicks to the next slide).




I am sure that most of you have heard of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in other instances. Researchers Thomas and Lynn Little (2001) claim that it is the theory that underlies and supports the practice of looping. The idea of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is that, at a given moment, individuals will act to satisfy the need that is strongest. According to the hierarchy, if the lower-level needs are met- the basics such as hunger and thirst at the bottom of the pyramid, followed by the need for security and protection- then an individual will be able to move up the pyramid to what is considered to be higher-level needs: (a) social needs, (b) esteem needs, and (c) self-actualization.

Looping classrooms, with their emphasis on longer term relationships, both student-to-teacher as well as peer-to-peer, may allow students to feel more secure, both socially and emotionally, which is particularly important for children who may be lacking

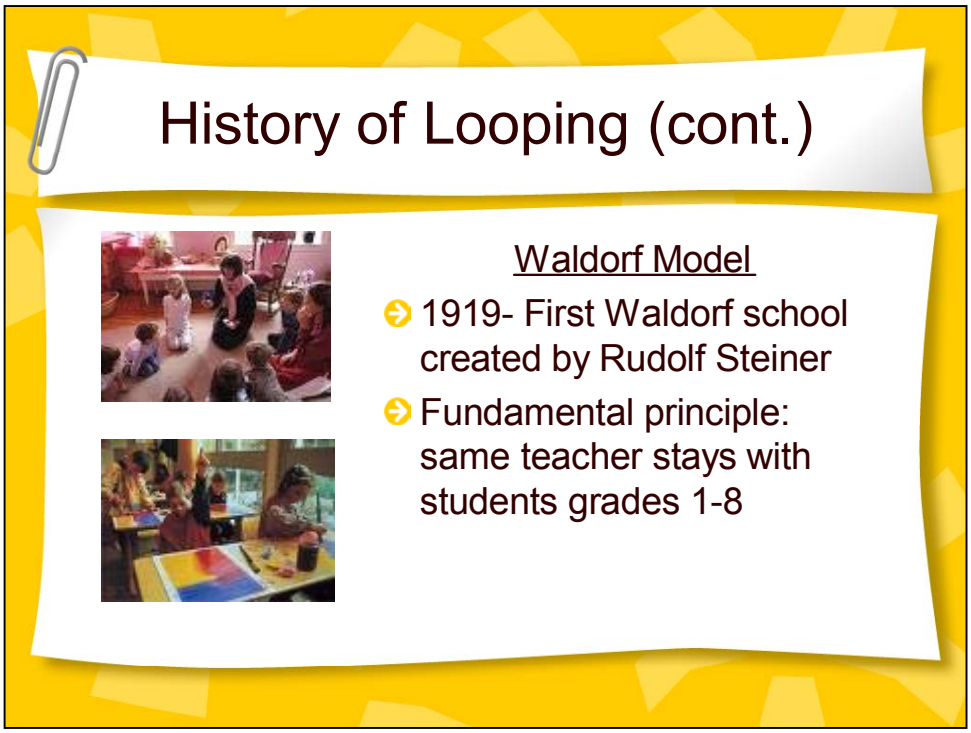
security at home. If these relationships are healthy, the social needs are met by the persistence of the group, and this may enable the children to be more available to pursue the higher-level needs. As the group gets more comfortable with each other, a sense of belonging and perhaps even love develops. The next level is self-esteem and recognition, which can come out of being a part of the group and being recognized for a particular talent or special knowledge. In order for these things to be possible, the looping teacher needs to spend time on social skills. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).




The practice of looping is actually very old in this country. Think of the early one room schoolhouse, which combined both looping and multiage teaching. According to Elliott and Capp (2003), schools only began to be arranged by rigid self-contained grade level classrooms, consisting of students of approximately the same age, in the early 20th century.

But even at that point, there was still interest in the practice of looping. In a 1913 memorandum, an Officer of Education from the United States Department of Education raised the question of whether looping would be more effective with students than shifting to a new teacher and group of peers every year, particularly in urban settings. The officer noted several advantages to looping that are still relevant today: (a) the teacher knows the children better and is able to build on previous learning in the

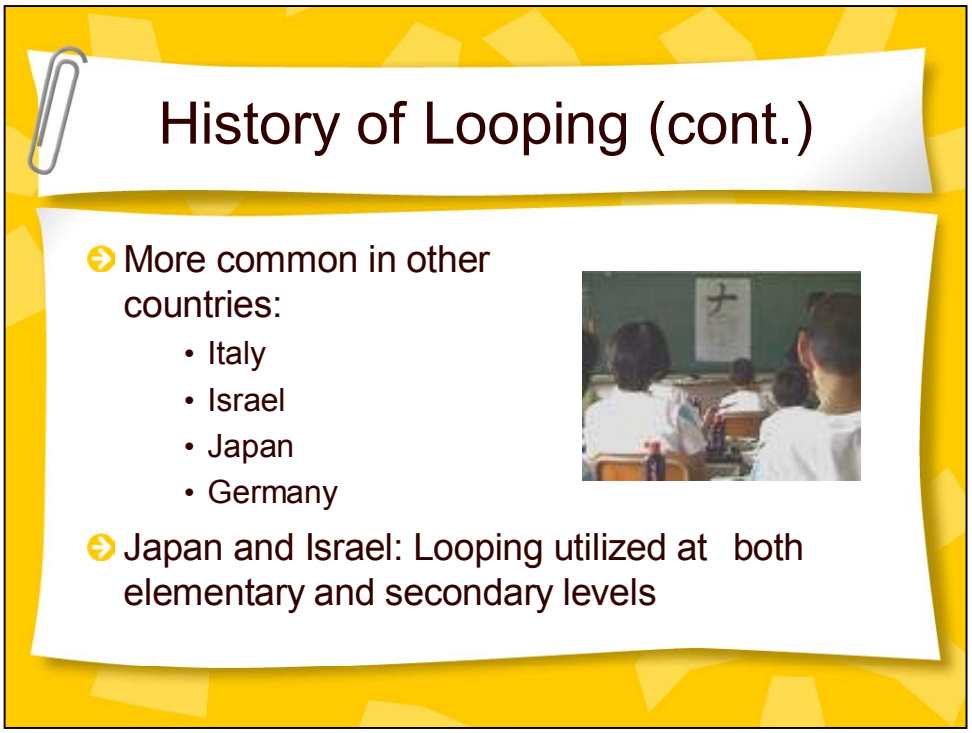
subsequent years after the first, (b) time is saved at the beginning of the second year because students are already conditioned to the rules of the classroom, and (c) parents have a better understanding of the teacher and his or her methods. These same advantages, as well as several others, have resurfaced in the educational community today. We will explore them in greater detail further along. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).



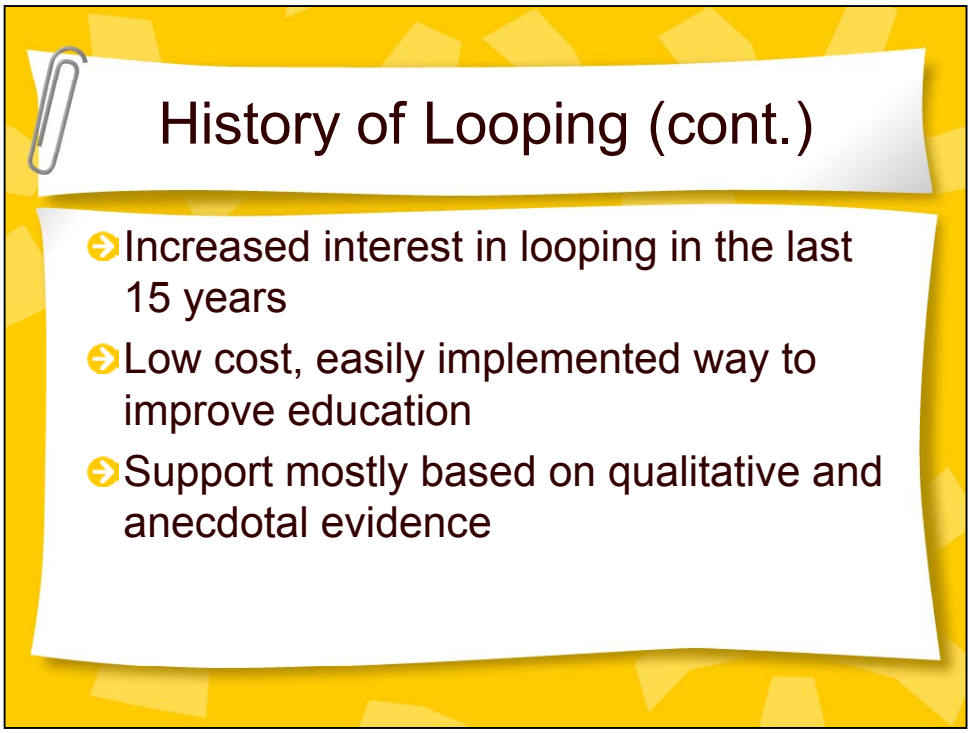

In 1919, the first Waldorf School was established by Austrian educator Rudolf Steiner. The school was designed to educate the children of Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory workers in Germany. Although not referred to as such in the literature on the Waldorf model, looping is an essential component. In fact, typically at Waldorf schools, the same teacher remains with his or her students from grades 1-8. In the Waldorf model, building and maintaining healthy relationships between teacher and students and among students is of fundamental importance. Although Waldorf schools began in Germany, they can be found all over the world today, including the U.S.

Of course, public schools in the United States that choose to loop would probably not loop the students from grades 1-8. As mentioned earlier, it is most common for looping groups to stay together for 2 years. However, similar in focus to Waldorf

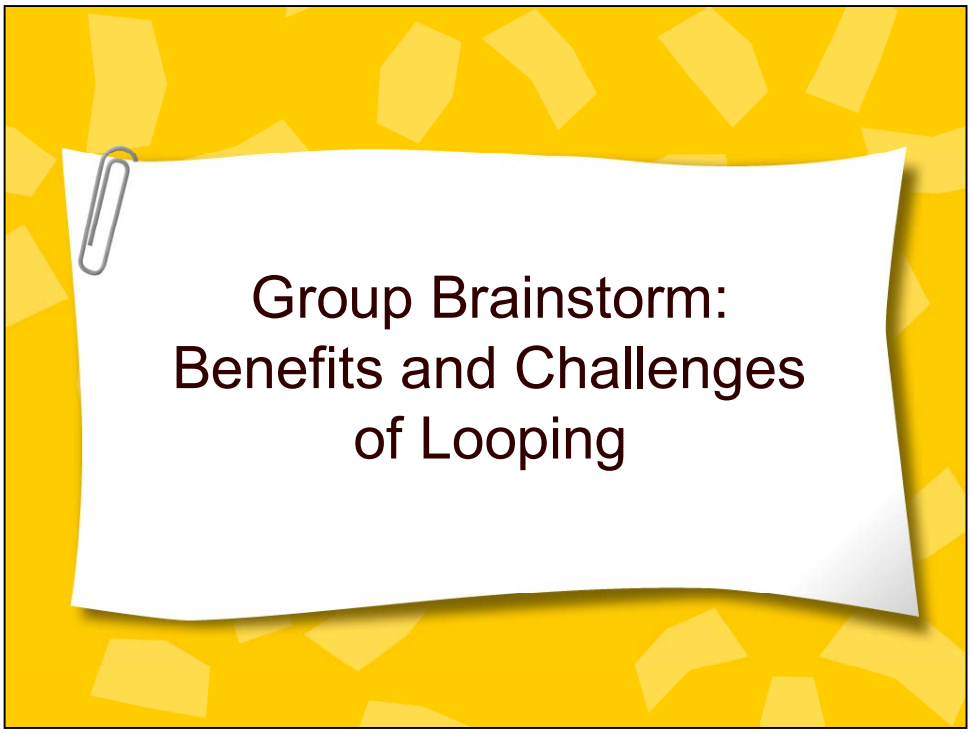
schools, the reason that many teachers may choose to loop is in order to strengthen relationships with their students. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).




Presently, looping is more common in other countries, such as: Italy, Israel, Japan, and Germany. In Japan and Israel, looping is utilized both at the elementary and the secondary levels. For instance, in the secondary schools in those countries, the same teacher will teach all levels of mathematics or science to the same group of students for all of their middle school or high school years. In the U.S., looping is most commonly used at the elementary level, although it is sometimes used at the secondary level, most often in middle schools. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).




There has been renewed interest in the practice of looping in the educational community within the last 15 years or so. Many reformers claim that it is a low cost, easily implemented way to improve education. In the current educational climate, as we all know, there is a great deal of emphasis on assessment via standardized testing. The proponents of looping claim that the practice allows more time for teachers and students to establish the type of rapport and connection that facilitate learning, among other benefits, which will be detailed shortly. The literature is generally very supportive of the practice, although there is still a great need for more quantitative research, as much of the support at this point is based on qualitative studies and anecdotal evidence. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).

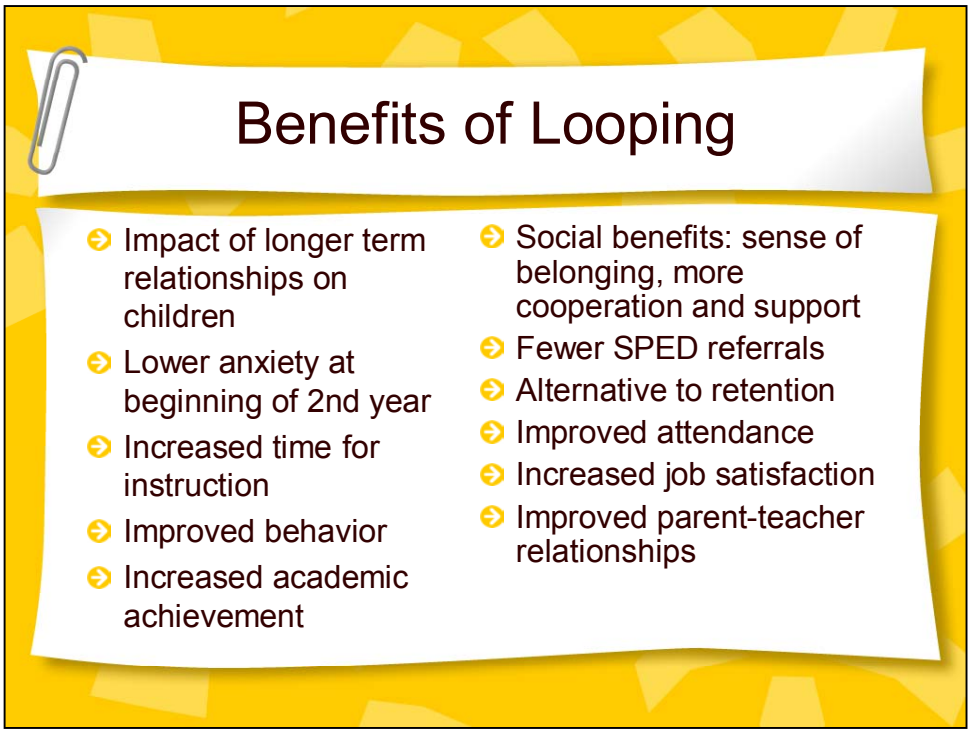



Now that we have covered some of the background, history, and theory behind looping, we are going to break into small groups to brainstorm the potential benefits and challenges of looping. We have already touched lightly upon some of the potential benefits. I want you to think about the group of students you have currently and/or all of the other groups of students you have had during your teaching career. Imagine how you would feel if you found out that you would be keeping that same group of students next year. Think about all of the positive things that could come out of that scenario, but also think about the challenges and potential problems. Please break into groups of three or four people to brainstorm both the benefits and the challenges. Everyone in your group can record your responses or you may pick one person to record your group's ideas on the "Benefits/Challenges" sheet in your packets, which is the third-to-last page. You will

have about 5 minutes to do this and then we will share our ideas. (Allow groups to brainstorm and record ideas for 5 minutes. While they are doing so, presenter opens flip chart to page with two columns--one labeled "Benefits" and the other labeled "Challenges").

Now we will take a few minutes to share responses. It will be interesting to see what ideas each of the groups came up with. Let's start with the benefits of looping. What did you come up with? Let's go around and hear one answer from each group first, and then continue around again until all ideas have been exhausted. (As groups give responses, presenter records each one under the "Benefits" column on the flip chart. When there are no new responses, presenter proceeds to the next step).

Now that we have made this detailed list of the possible benefits of looping, let's move on to the challenges that you identified. We will start with the group that went last previously and work our way backwards. (As groups give responses, presenter records each one under the "Challenges" column on the flip chart, until there are no new responses). So, let's take a closer look at some of these benefits and challenges or potential pitfalls to looping. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).




(When this slide first appears, so as not to overwhelm the participants because there are quite a few benefits, the slide will be blank except for the words "Benefits of Looping." The presenter will reveal one benefit at a time. As the presenter reveals each of the benefits, she will check each off of the flip chart list that was created by the whole group).

The literature on looping details myriad benefits, many of which you have already come up with during the brainstorming time. I want to mention again that there is still a great need for more quantitative research on the practice, since much of the support is not based on hard data, but rather on anecdotal accounts. Many of the benefits go together and build upon each other.

First of all, many proponents mention the positive impact of longer term relationships on children. Many educators feel pressed for time in the era of high stakes testing, but looping affords teachers and students more time to get to know each other and develop trust in each other. This can be especially important for students who face instability in their home lives. Also, as Burke (1996) noted, parents do not send their children to a new pediatrician every year because they understand that the compiled knowledge that their child's doctor has will be beneficial. It seems that the same would be true with teachers. A teacher who spends more than 1 year with a group of students will have an even better understanding of the children's strengths and weaknesses, preferred learning styles, and background knowledge, than a teacher who is with her students for the traditional 1 year.

A second benefit to looping is lower anxiety for both students and teachers at the beginning of the second year. Most students generally feel some anxiety at the beginning of the school year, worrying about making new friends in the classroom and how their new teacher will be. Looping alleviates the anxiety because everyone already knows each other quite well.

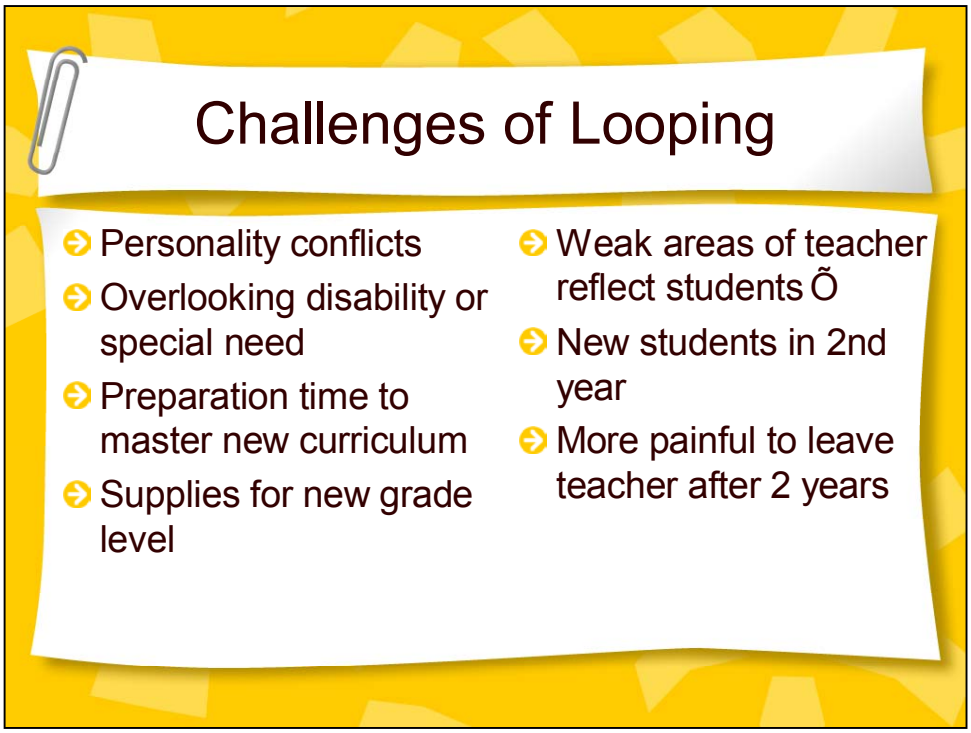
Also, in the second year, because students are already familiar with the teacher's expectations and routines, a great deal of time is saved--time which can be used for instruction. Teachers who loop also report improved behavior, due in part to the fact that the rules and expectations become very clear, but also because there is even more incentive for the teacher to manage inappropriate behaviors early on, since they will have that child in their classroom for more than 1 year.

A few studies have been done which show increased academic achievement for students in looping environments when compared with their counterparts in traditional classrooms. The most notable study was done by Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1997). Their study of Project F.A.S.T. in East Cleveland, showed that students in the looping environment outscored their nonlooping counterparts on standardized tests in both reading and mathematics, even when both groups of students were taught by the same teacher.

I have already mentioned a bit about the social benefits of looping. In persistent groups, when the group dynamic is healthy, students develop a sense of belonging and trust in each other. They become more willing to take risks, and speak up in class. Looping can be especially beneficial in this sense for shy students and also for English Language Learners (ELLs). Typically, competition is diminished in looping classrooms, and a greater sense of cooperation and mutual support emerges.

After looping for Grades 1-8 was implemented the Attleboro School District in Massachusetts, administrators noted positive results. Not only did special education referrals decrease by over 55% and retention rates decrease by 43%, but attendance rates improved for both students and teachers (Roberts).

Looping teachers have reported greater job satisfaction than when they were teaching group of students for the traditional 1 year and both teachers and parents have cited improved parent-teacher relationships as one of the benefits of looping. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).




(As with the last slide, this slide will be blank except for the title. The presenter will click to reveal the challenges one by one and will check the challenges off of the flip chart that the group created).

Probably the most serious challenge of looping is the possibility of personality conflicts. These conflicts can be between peers or between the teacher and one or more students. These issues can develop over time, such that behaviors that were not present in the 1st year can emerge in subsequent years. Because a familial atmosphere often develops in looping classroom, sometimes negative siblinglike behaviors emerge. The looping teacher needs to be quick to address these issues in order to maintain a positive dynamic in the classroom.

Under benefits, I mentioned that there tend to be fewer special education referrals when looping is used, most likely because teachers feel that they have more time to get their students to where they need to be at the end of 2 years, or however many years they will be looping together. On the flip side, a potential problem is that a teacher could overlook a disability or special need. This could also happen in a traditional classroom, but it is more serious in a looping classroom, since the problem could go untreated for the length of the loop.

Two challenges that go hand in hand for the looping teacher are finding the time to master the curriculum of the new grade level and also preparing and/or buying supplies for that curriculum. A looping team could potentially share their materials, but that is something that would have to be worked out and agreed upon ahead of time.

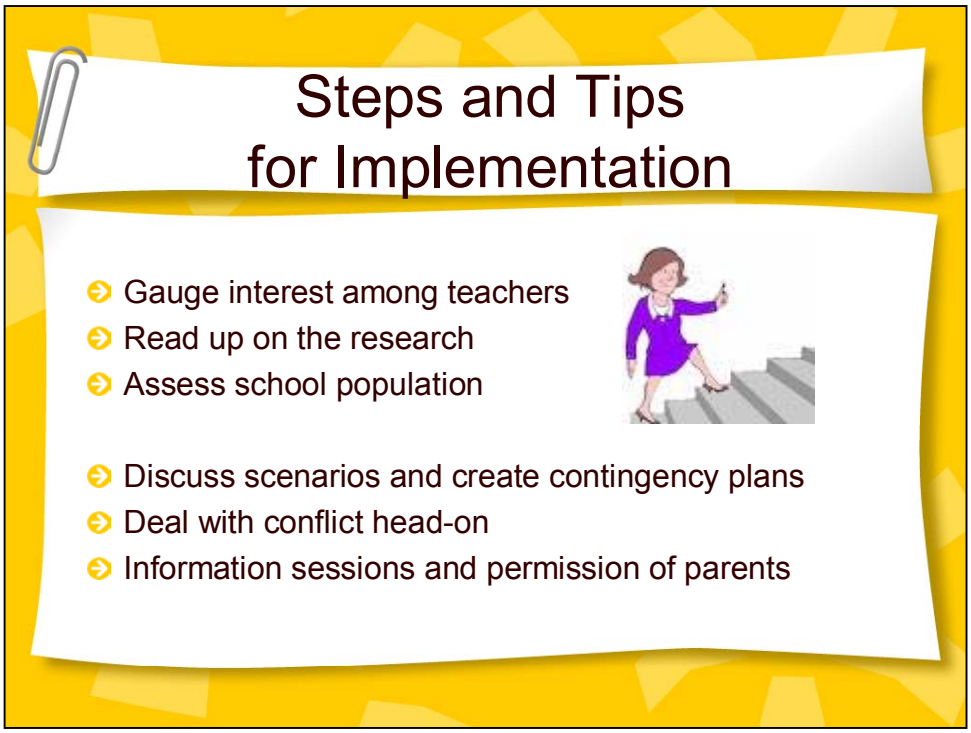
When presented with the idea of looping, some parents worry about the possibility of their children getting "stuck" with an ineffective teacher for 2 years. While this is certainly a valid concern, the literature shows that looping actually acts as a sort of quality control. Whereas parents may be willing to deal with what they consider to be a lower quality teacher for 1 year, they are much less likely to do so if they know that their child will have that teacher for 2 or more years. Also, it is generally found that the most energetic and effective teachers are the ones who volunteer to loop, due to the extra work that goes into it. That being said, almost all teachers have stronger and weaker subjects. If a teacher's weak area reflects a student's, then that would pose a concern.

New students arriving in the second year may also pose a bit of a challenge. Since the rest of the group is already very familiar with each other, the teacher, and the

routines, new students may feel like outsiders and have a difficult time integrating. It is the job of the looping teacher to develop a way to make new students feel welcome and integrate them into the group as quickly and fully as possible.

The final challenge that comes out in the literature is the idea that it will be more painful for students, particularly the youngest primary students who become more attached, to leave a teacher after 2 or more years. The anecdotal evidence suggests that while it is usually a bittersweet goodbye when the loop is completed, the students generally take it is stride and with the confidence they have gained in themselves through the looping environment, they are able to adapt nicely to their new classroom environment

On the next slide, we will look at steps for implementation and some tips for minimizing some of these challenges. (Presenter clicks to the next slide).




Looping is often a grassroots reform. Usually, looping is not implemented school-wide, but rather by a few teachers who decide that they would like to give it a try. If it is successful, other teachers at the school may be encouraged to loop in subsequent years. A first step in moving toward looping would be to gauge interest among the faculty of your school. Because the commitment of the teacher is so crucial to looping, a teacher should never be pressured into looping. If there is a core group of teachers who *are* interested in exploring the possibility of looping further, they can form a study group to read up on the research, in order to be able to present it to other teachers, as well as to parents.

Next, the study group should assess the school population to determine feasibility of implementing looping. Although looping has been shown to work well at a variety of

different schools, one situation in which it would not work well is with schools with highly mobile populations. If the composition of students shifts too often, then the benefits of looping would essentially be nullified.

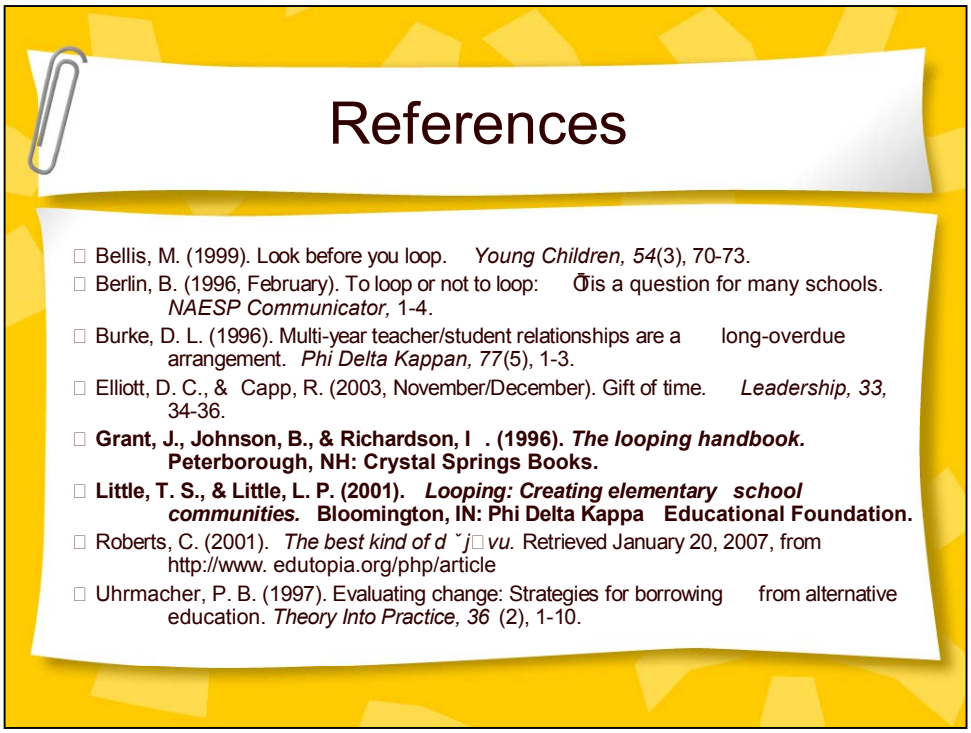
It is highly recommended that once a school is ready to move forward to implement looping, that the staff and administration discuss ALL possible scenarios and challenges that could arise and create contingency plans and agreements on how these things will be dealt with. Certain things, such as whether extra planning time and materials will be afforded for looping teachers and teams, if teachers will remain in the same room for both years of the loop or will switch with their looping team member, and what will happen if there is an insurmountable personality conflict in one or more of the looping classrooms, need to be discussed beforehand.

It is also recommended that looping remain flexible, and, although everyone should go in with the intention of keeping the looping group together, teachers, administrators, and parents need to be realistic in their expectations. Certain mixes of students will not be able to achieve a positive enough dynamic to stay intact for more than 1 year, and there should always be the option, which would be clearly communicated at the outset, of shifting students around as deemed necessary. Also, parents should maintain the option of petitioning to move their students out of the looping environment after the 1st year. These things being said, it is important for teachers and administrators to deal with conflicts (between student and teacher, between teacher and parent, and among students) as soon as they arise.

Before a school implements looping, parents should be well informed about the practice. The school should publish articles in the school newsletter, as well as host information sessions for parents. It is also suggested that parents sign permission slips before their children are placed in looping classrooms.

Please turn now to the second-to-last page in your handout packet, entitled "Pre-looping Survey for Teachers." This is a brief self-inventory for you to gauge your own comfort level with looping. Please take a few moments to read over and consider each of the questions and check off the ones that apply to you. (Allow about two minutes for participants to complete the survey. Then click to the next slide).


Does anyone have any questions or comments about anything that I have covered today? (Allow time to call on anyone with questions or comments. If there are none, move directly on to the final slide).




Thank you all very much for coming today. On the screen right now are the references that I used in today's presentation, and these are also found on the last page of your handout packets. If you are interested in learning more about the practice of looping, these are excellent resources. In particular, I would recommend *The Looping Handbook* by Grant, Johnson, and Richardson, and *Looping: Creating Elementary School Communities* by Little and Little, as wonderful overviews of the practice. I will be up front if you have any more questions or comments. Thank you again for coming and have a wonderful afternoon.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, this author presented the inservice, which she designed as an introduction to looping for elementary level administrators and teachers. The chapter included the set up for the inservice, as well as a copy of the PowerPoint slide show presentation, complete with detailed notes and handouts. In Chapter 5, the author offered a discussion of the project, including limitations, as well as recommendations for future development. Also, colleagues' reviews and critiques will be discussed.

# Chapter 5

# DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to develop an inservice presentation designed as an introduction to the practice of looping for elementary school teachers and administrators. Although the current educational climate is placing ever-greater emphasis on standardized assessments of students, many educators are looking for ways to get back in touch with the more humane side of teaching. Effective teaching is virtually impossible without rapport and good relationships between students and teachers. This author has experienced the benefits of cultivating a strong sense of classroom community and rapport between teacher and students. Looping is one low cost, easily implemented method that educational reformers are promoting as a way for teachers and students to come to know one another better, thus allowing teachers to better support their students in every way—intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

It was the goal of this author to develop a presentation to create awareness about the practice of looping, with the hope that inservice participants would be encouraged to do further study and possibly consider the implementation of looping in their own schools. The presentation synthesized the history, theory behind, and advantages and possible challenges of looping, and also gave some tips for implementation.

## Assessment of the Project

The inservice presentation was evaluated by three elementary level educators. At the conclusion of the presentation, the evaluators were asked to write down responses to

the following questions: (a) Which, if any, part(s) of the presentation needed more information or was unclear?; (b) Which, is any, part(s) of the presentation was too lengthy?; (c) What else would you change about or add to this presentation?; and, (d) Please write any other comments about this presentation. Overall, the evaluators were very positive in their feedback regarding the presentation. According to their written responses, the evaluators felt that the presentation gave a good overview of looping and that the slides and accompanying commentary were clear. They also agreed that the length of the presentation was appropriate.

## Limitations of the Project

First, this project was limited by the fact that there is a dearth of quantitative research on the practice of looping. Through the Review of Literature this researcher found a great deal of support for the practice of looping. This support should be tempered by the fact that the majority of the articles were based on anecdotal experiences and/or qualitative studies. This is not to say that these experiences are not valid, but rather that the claims that many authors have made should be further substantiated by more research in the future. In this author's opinion, looping, which enables teachers to better understand their students' intellectual, social, and emotional needs, makes intuitive sense as an educational tool, but there is still a need for more research on best practices and the effects of looping on students.

A second limitation to the potential contribution of this project is the fact that in order for schools to be willing to offer this presentation, there must already be some type of interest from the faculty. School administrators would be unlikely to use valuable

inservice/professional development time on this inservice if their schools were not already considering the implementation of looping. Because of this, this author suggests that this inservice presentation would be best used in a teacher education program seminar format, where sessions are open to curious students, rather than being required of school faculty.

## Recommendations

One of the evaluators suggested the addition of real life anecdotes to illustrate some of the benefits and challenges of looping, thus adding interest. Another evaluator suggested the inclusion of a list of local schools where looping is currently practiced. This author agrees that both of these suggestions would improve the inservice presentation, and she would work to include them should the opportunity to present the presentation arise.

A recommendation for future presentations of this inservice would be to develop a more substantial post presentation survey for participants. In particular, a series of questions with a Likert type scale would provide invaluable feedback for this author, since one of the goals of the presentation was to increase awareness about the practice, in the hope that at least some of the participants would pursue further study and even consider its implementation. For example, a useful survey could include questions such as: (a) How likely are you to read further research about the practice of looping?; (b) How much has this presentation added to your understanding of looping?; and (c) How likely are you to consider the implementation of looping at your school/in your classroom?

## Project Summary

The success of this project was determined by the three elementary colleagues who evaluated it. According to these evaluators, the inservice presentation was a clear and informative introduction to the practice of looping. They felt that the length of the presentation was adequate and that each of the areas was covered sufficiently. The two suggestions for improvement of the presentation were to include interesting anecdotes about the advantages and challenges of looping, and to include a list of local schools that currently practice looping.

The fundamental limitation of this presentation (and any project regarding looping) is the paucity of quantitative studies that have been done on the practice. Although quantitative research has been done on the practice, the vast majority of articles about looping are based on anecdotal and/or qualitative evidence. Therefore, it was difficult to wholeheartedly laud the benefits of looping when so much of the literature was not based on hard data.

The second limitation is the fact that the contribution of this presentation may be minimized by the fact that, although in this author's opinion it is a very interesting topic for all educators to consider, in reality, the audience would most likely be limited to those who are already interested in looping. Alternatively, the presentation would work well at a teacher education seminar, in which fledgling teachers have the option of learning about looping.

This project synthesized the available research on looping at the elementary level. It is this author's hope that more research will be done on the practice to not only validate

the experiences of the many teachers who intuitively know that it works for their students, but to also add to the understanding of best practices. In the future, this inservice presentation could be modified to include the findings of new research studies on the practice.

REFERENCES

Bellis, M. (1999). Look before you loop. *Young Children, 54*(3), 70-73.

Berlin, B. (1996, February). To loop or not to loop: 'Tis a question for many schools. *NAESP Communicator,* 1-4. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from http://www .naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentID=95&action=print

Black, S. (2000, June). Together again. *American School Board Journal,* 40-43.

Burke, D. L. (1996). Multi-year teacher/student relationships are a long-overdue arrangement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(5), 1-3. Retrieved January 16, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Burke, D. L. (1997). Looping: Adding time, strengthening relationships. *ERIC Digest,* 1-3. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 414 098)

Chapman, J. (1999). A looping journey. *Young Children, 54*(3), 80-83.

Chirichello, M., & Chirichello, C. (2001). A standing ovation for looping: The critics respond. *Childhood Education, 78*(1), 2-9.

Elliott, D. C., & Capp, R. (2003, November/December). Gift of time. *Leadership, 33,* 34-36.

Forsten, C., Grant, J., & Richardson, I. (1999, March). Multiage and looping: Borrowing from the past. *Principal*, 15-18.

Gaustad, J. (1998). Implementing looping. *ERIC Digest*, 1-6. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 429 330)

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

Haslinger, J., Kelly, P., & O'Lare, L. (1996). Countering absenteeism, anonymity, and apathy. *Educational Leadership, 54*(1), 47-49.

Jacobson, L. (1997). 'Looping' catches on as a way to build strong ties. *Education Week, 17*(7), 1-5. Retrieved January 9, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Jacoby, D. (1994, March). Twice the learning and twice the love. *Teaching K-8, 24,* 58-59.

Kelly, P. A. et al. (1998). A place to hang our hats. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 62-64.

Krogmann, J., & Van Sant, R. (2000). *Enhancing relationships and improving academics in the elementary school setting by implementing looping.* (Master's Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University), 1-32. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 443 557)

LAB at Brown University. (1997). *Looping: Supporting student learning through long-term relationships.* Retrieved January 17, 2007, from www.alliance.brown.edu /topics/reform.shtml

Little, T. S., & Dacus, N. B. (1999, September). Looping: Moving up with the class. *Educational Leadership, 57,* 42-45.

Little, T. S., & Little, L. P. (2001). *Looping: Creating elementary school communities.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Looping: Two years with the same class. (1998). *NEA Today*, *17*(2), 1-4. Retrieved January 9, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

McAteer, M. (2001). In the loop. *Teacher Magazine, 13*(1), 1-4. Retrieved January 9, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Nichols, J. D., & Nichols, G. W. (2001). The impact of looping and non-looping classroom environments on parental attitudes. *Educational Research Quarterly, 26*(1), 23-40.

O'Neill, J. (2004). We're baaack! *NEA Today, 22*(7), 1-3. Retrieved January 9, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Roberts, C. (2001). *The best kind of déjà vu.* Retrieved January 20, 2007, from http://www.edutopia.org/php/article.php?id=Art_736

Schieffer, J., & Busse, R. T. (2001). *Low SES minority fourth-graders' achievement from an urban public Waldorf and comparison school.* Retrieved January 24, 2007, from http://www.waldorflibrary.org/Journal_articles/RB6104.pdf

Uhrmacher, P. B. (1997). Evaluating change: Strategies for borrowing from alternative education. *Theory Into Practice, 36*(2), 1-10. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.

Vann, A. (1997). Leveling about looping. *Education Digest, 63*(2), 1-3. Retrieved January 9, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Wynne, E., & Walberg, H. (1994). Persisting groups: An overlooked force for learning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(7), 1-7. Retrieved January 16, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Zahorik, J. A., & Dichanz, H. (1994). Teaching for understanding in German schools. *Educational Leadership, 51*(5), 75-77.

# APPENDIX A

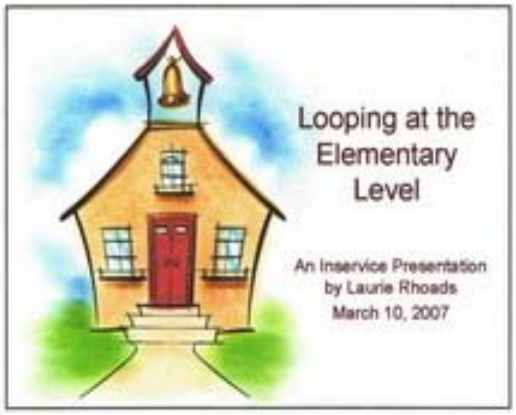
Inservice Handout Packet

# Looping at the Elementary Level

Laurie Rhoads

March 24, 2007

# Handout Packet




## What is Looping?

- Educational practice where teacher stays with same group of students for more than 1 year
- Also know as:
  - Multiyear grouping/placement
  - Teacher-student progression
  - 20-month classroom (Berlin)
  - Persistence grouping (Bellis)
  - Continuous learning (Roberts)
- NOT multiage grouping

## Theory Behind Looping: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- Humans will act to satisfy strongest need
- When lower-level needs are secure, individual is available for higher levels
- Focus on relationships in looping allows students to pursue higher-level needs

## History of Looping

- One room schoolhouse
- Early 20th century rigid grade levels become standard
- 1913 U.S. Department of Education memorandum

## History of Looping (cont.)

Waldorf Model

- 1919- First Waldorf school created by Rudolf Steiner
- Fundamental principle: same teacher stays with students grades 1-8

## History of Looping (cont.)

- More common in other countries:
  - Italy
  - Israel
  - Japan
  - Germany

- Japan and Israel: Looping utilized at both elementary and secondary levels

## History of Looping (cont.)

- Increased interest in looping in the last 15 years
- Low cost, easily implemented way to improve education
- Support mostly based on qualitative and anecdotal evidence

## Group Brainstorm: Benefits and Challenges of Looping

## Benefits of Looping

- Impact of longer term relationships on children
- Lower anxiety at beginning of 2nd year
- Increased time for instruction
- Improved behavior
- Increased academic achievement
- Social benefits: sense of belonging, more cooperation and support
- Fewer SPED referrals
- Alternative to retention
- Improved attendance
- Increased job satisfaction
- Improved parent-teacher relationships

## Challenges of Looping

- Personality conflicts
- Overlooking disability or special need
- Preparation time to master new curriculum
- Supplies for new grade level
- Weak areas of teacher reflect students'
- New students in 2nd year
- More painful to leave teacher after 2 years

## Steps and Tips for Implementation

- Gauge interest among teachers
- Read up on the research
- Assess school population

- Discuss scenarios and create contingency plans
- Deal with conflict head-on
- Information sessions and permission of parents

## Questions or Comments?

Looping at the Elementary Level Inservice

# Group Brainstorm

| Benefits of Looping | Challenges of Looping |
| --- | --- |
| | |

**Pre-looping Survey for Teachers**

_____ 1. Are you interested in looping to the next grade-level with your current class?

_____ 2. Would you be interested in moving to a different grade level next year in order to loop with a class the following year?

_____ 3. Would you be willing to change the grade level at which you teach in order to accommodate a teacher who does wish to loop?

_____ 4. Are you willing to move your classroom in order to loop?

_____ 5. Would you loop if you knew in advance that you did not have to move your classroom?

_____ 6. If your answer to Number 1 was "no," please mark all of the following that apply:

_____ I am a new teacher, and I am not yet totally comfortable with the grade level to which I am currently assigned.

_____ I have a number of years experience at my current grade level, and I think it would be too difficult and time consuming to learn the curriculum and prepare materials for another grade level.

_____ I have a hard time with change.

_____ I really like the people with whom I am now working, and I don't want to start over with a new group of teachers at another grade level.

_____ The developmental age of the children I now teacher is perfectly suited to my disposition; to go to an older grade or a younger grade might not fit my personality well.

_____ There could be professional certification problems if I move up or down with a looping class.

_____ Other reasons. (Please specify- *Not in the original*)

_____

_____

Reprinted with permission from:

Little, T. S., & Little, L. P. (2001). *Looping: Creating elementary school communities.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation (pp. 30-31)

## Suggested Reading List
## References on Looping


Bellis, M. (1999). Look before you loop. *Young Children, 54*(3), 70-73.

Berlin, B. (1996, February). To loop or not to loop: 'Tis a question for many schools. *NAESP Communicator,* 1-4.

Burke, D. L. (1996). Multi-year teacher/student relationships are a long-overdue arrangement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(5), 1-3.

Elliott, D. C., & Capp, R. (2003, November/December). Gift of time. *Leadership, 33,* 34-36.

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

**Little, T. S., & Little, L. P. (2001). *Looping: Creating elementary school communities.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.**

Roberts, C. (2001). *The best kind of déjà vu.* Retrieved January 20, 2007, from http://www.edutopia.org/php/article

Uhrmacher, P. B. (1997). Evaluating change: Strategies for borrowing from alternative education. *Theory Into Practice, 36*(2), 1-10.

# APPENDIX B

Publisher Permission

1777 Grape Avenue
Boulder, CO 80304

March 13, 2007

Phi Delta Kappa
408 N. Union Street
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request your permission to reprint the "Pre-Looping Survey for Teachers," which is found in Appendix A (pages 30-31) of the following title:

> Looping: Creating Elementary School Communities (2001) by Thomas S. Little and Lynn Priest Little

I am a Master of Education student at Regis University in Denver, Colorado and I am currently working on my Master's capstone project, which will be an inservice presentation designed to be an introduction to the practice of looping for elementary educators. I would like to include the survey as a self-inventory for participants to use at the end of the presentation. If granted your permission, the survey would become part of my final project, which may be stored electronically at Regis University. I will not be receiving any compensation for this work.

If you have any questions or need further clarification on the purpose of my project, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at the above address, as well as by phone: (720) 308-1074 or by email: lkrhoads@aol.com. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Laurie K Rhoads

Laurie K. Rhoads

RECEIVED MAR 16 2007

Permission Granted
3/27/07
Jerri Hampton