

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LOOPING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN  
RELATION TO SELECT ACADEMIC AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT  
VARIABLES**

**By**

**D. Andrew Ford**

**B.M.E. Central Missouri State University, 1990**

**M.S.E. Central Missouri State University, 2000**

**Submitted to the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies and to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Education**

Dissertation Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation defended: \_\_\_\_\_

The Dissertation Committee for D. Andrew Ford certifies  
that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LOOPING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN  
RELATION TO SELECT ACADEMIC AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT  
VARIABLES

---

Chairperson

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether looping, a multi-year teaching arrangement where the teacher remains with the same group of students for two or more years is a practicable alternative, as assessed by teacher opinion, to the typical one year grouping of students. Because the teacher is the pivotal figure within the classroom and the one who is a major participant in the looping process, it is the teacher around which this investigation is built. This study gathers the perceptions of looping teachers and compares those perceptions with the existing body of research.

An intensive literature review was conducted and interview questions were developed based on the recurring themes of the literature. An electronic survey was sent to all public elementary schools in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska to identify educators who have completed a looping cycle in grades pre K – 5. From responses to that broad survey, a sample of twenty teachers was selected based on their willingness to participate and teaching experience. Interviews were conducted with these educators, who have participated in and completed at least one full looping cycle. Data was collected through an interview of pre K - 5 teachers who have completed a looping cycle.

Results indicated that the looping teachers perceived benefits in the areas of academic achievement, instructional climate, and relationships between teacher, student, and families.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my wife Brenda for the love, support, and the constant encouragement throughout this long process. Without her this dream would have never come to fruition. I would also like to thank my sons Tyler and Connor for understanding when time was short due to class, homework, and revisions. I hope that they remain inquisitive and never stop asking why. I would also like to thank Hugh, Janet, Dale, and Luci, the in-laws, for asking me about my research. I am sure my answers were short at times when things were looking bleak. Thank you for continuing to ask.

I would also like to thank Mickey Imber, my advisor. His encouragement throughout the writing process was extremely valuable, especially when one avenue came to a dead end. He encouraged me to forge ahead and explore another option. I would be remiss if I didn't thank two people who never actually read one word of the paper but I feel they have been with me through the entire process, my parents. My parents maintained high standards for their only son, I only hope that I have come close to achieving those goals.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	8
The History of Persistent Groups/Looping.....	9
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Purpose.....	11
Research Questions.....	11
Limitations.....	12
CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature.....	13
Academic Achievement.....	13
Instructional Climate/Relationships.....	17
Perceptions of Participants.....	19
Summary of the Literature.....	22
CHAPTER THREE: Method.....	24
Validity.....	24
Procedures.....	24
Research questions.....	25

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	27
Prior Studies.....	27
Interview Results .....	31
Participants.....	31
General Perceptions about Teaching in a Looping Arrangement.....	32
Academic Effects of Looping .....	38
Climate/Relationships in a Looping Environment.....	42
Behavior/Discipline .....	43
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	44
Comparison to the Findings .....	44
Academic Effects of Looping.....	44
Climate/Relationships.....	45
Pedagogical Effects.....	47
Conclusion .....	47
Recommendations.....	49
REFERENCES .....	52
APPENDICES .....	54
Looping Survey.....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Collection of Studies.....	28
Table2:	Frequency of Common Themes Found in the Literature.....	30

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As the call for accountability grows louder, leaders in education continue to look for novel methods to increase the academic achievement of students. It would seem that the American education system would begin to look much differently than it did two hundred years ago; however, little has changed in the structure of American schooling during the last century and a half. The configuration proposed by Horace Mann in the mid 1800's called for the division of students by age and grade attainment. The model presented by Mann continues to exist in most schools in virgin form still today. While the configuration of education in the United States remains practically untouched the American educational system continues to fall under much scrutiny and educators have been charged with the duty of finding methods to improve the academic achievement of all students. Instructional methods, procurement and certification of highly qualified teachers, and relationships between student and teacher continue to topics which are explored, however, the basic structure is seen as a minor consideration in the improvement of the academic achievement of American students.

Looping, a program where a group of students remain with the same teacher for two or more years is not a new concept but continues to be implemented as one method to improve achievement for all students. Existing research generally supports looping as a method of providing a positive, alternative learning environment for students and focuses on the social aspect of the method (Hampton et. al, 1997; Lincoln, 2000; Nichols & Nichols, 2002). Many looping studies have been primarily opinion based centered on the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents (Burke, 1997; Liu, 1997; Rasmussen, 1998). A few studies have attempted to examine the effect of the looping environment on



student achievement (Bogart, 2002; Hampton et al., 1997; Lincoln, 1997; Skinner 1998; Yang, 1997).

### The History of Persistent Groups/Looping

The history of persistent groups, or looping, is not a new one in the United States. One room school houses early in American education employed the technique mostly out of necessity. Often there was one teacher for multiple grades and that one teacher taught at the same school for multiple years essentially creating what is now considered a looping arrangement. The literature suggests that the looping concept in the United States arose in the early 1900's as evidenced by a U.S. Department of Education memo from 1913 which asked "Shall teachers in graded city schools be advanced from grade to grade with their pupils through a series of two, three, four or more years, so they may come to know the children they teach and be able to build the work of the latter years on that of the earlier years...?" (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). Schools began to adopt the persistent group concept but widespread implementation was never achieved. Even though the idea of persistent groups failed to gain wide spread acceptance in the United States the idea has been implemented successfully in European countries (Wynne and Walbert, 1994; Zahorik and Dichanz, 1994).

Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian educator and philosopher was one of the first educators to promote the idea of persistent groups. Steiner founded the Waldorf Schools in Germany in the early 1900's to educate the children of the workers in the local cigarette factory. The premise of the Waldorf concept was simple; teachers remained with the same group of children as they progressed from grades one through eight. Steiner believed the long-term relationship with their teacher benefited the children in many ways. Other examples of persistent groups can be found throughout Europe

(Wynne and Walberg, 1994; Zahorik and Dichanz, 1994). Some schools in Japan also follow the multi-year design and incorporate multi-grade groupings into the classrooms (Simel, 1997).

A new interest in persistent groups has surfaced over the past ten years as accountability grows and educators continue to search for instructional methods designed to increase the academic achievement of their students. Educators have turned to looping arrangements in order to build long term relationships between teachers and students and to ultimately raise the academic achievement of students. Studies continue to show that looping offers many advantages to traditional one-year designs; reduced start up time, familiarity between students and teacher, increased sense of stability, greater student confidence, increased sense of community, positive relationships with parents, and increased student achievement (Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997; Nichols, J., & Nichols, G., 2002; Roberts, J., 2003).

#### Statement of the Problem

Educators have been challenged with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 to find innovative, research based methods of teaching and organizing the learning process. NCLB (2001) directs educators to implement scientifically based instructional strategies in order to raise student achievement. Many schools respond to the challenge by implementing programs and reforms with very little research to back up the claims that the initiative has been proven effective. Looping is an example of a program that continues to be implemented but has produced mixed results in educational research. The literature on looping generally supports the process by providing opinions of those involved. Students, parents, teachers, and principals commonly share positive opinions of the looping process (Burke, 1997; Liu, 1997; Rasmussen, 1998).

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of looping teachers about the effect looping has on the academic achievement of students and to determine if looping is a practicable alternative to the typical one-year grouping of students. Because the teacher is the pivotal figure within the classroom and the one who is a major participant in the looping process, it is the teacher that around which this investigation is built. This study incorporates the perceptions of looping teachers and compares the perceptions with the existing body of research in order to identify trends in the implementation of looping classrooms and the effects upon the students.

### Research Questions

1. Does looping offer a feasible alternative to the traditional one year grade grouping as perceived by teachers currently employing the looping process in terms of raising academic achievement of students?
2. Does looping have an effect on the educational environment of the classroom as perceived by teachings currently employing the looping process?
3. Are there specific pedagogy features of looping that educators believe are important?

The first question examines the feasibility of looping when considered as an alternative method to raise student achievement. The question will provide information for educators looking for new research based methods to increase student achievement. Question two addresses the environment of the classroom. Studies have shown that positive connections between students and teachers increase the academic achievement of the students (Caine& Caine, 1994; Stipek, 2006; Witmer, 2005). Question three

identifies specific elements unique to looping programs that educators find to be important to the academic success of students.

### Limitations

Despite the efforts to control limitations of the study some remained. First, the study relies upon the ability to find a majority of looping studies in order to provide a substantial foundation for the literature review. Every attempt was made to find all available literature for the study. A keyword search was conducted in the electronic search engines in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Wilson OmniFile, Dissertation Abstracts Online, and the ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database. Resources from the Educational Research Services (ERS) were also examined for articles and studies related to looping, multi-year grouping, and persistent groups.

Another limitation is the lack of ability to control the varying teaching characteristics. Teachers inherently exhibit differing degrees of ability and effectiveness which can be attributed to experience, familiarity with the subject matter, and teacher or student personality. The study also relies wholly on the opinions of looping teachers. Teacher opinions of the looping program may be skewed by a less than ideal class or an above average class while in the looping process. The interview questions addressed only factors in the classroom directly affected by the looping process.

Many studies on the effects of looping on student academic achievement rely on comparisons of classrooms within school sites or between two school systems; this presents a threat to generalizability. The threat to generalizability has been controlled for in this study through the use of a sample from a number of school sites, from a large region.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature on looping can be categorized into three fundamental groups 1) the effect of looping on the academic achievement of students, 2) the effect of looping on the social structures within the classroom between student and teacher and classroom climate, and 3) the opinions of students, teachers, principals, and parents regarding the effectiveness and palatability of looping. Of the twenty-six studies found between the years 1997 and 2008 relating to looping, eight examined the effects of looping on the academic achievement of students, nine studies investigated the effects of looping on student-teacher relationships and classroom climate, and nine studies attempted to gauge the perceptions of looping from the view of the student, teacher, administrator and parent. Since the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 twenty-two studies have been conducted with 13 of the twenty-two written within the past five years. This new curiosity in looping would seem to indicate an interest in finding a reform that will fulfill the requirements of NCLB (2001), to raise the academic achievement of all students.

#### Academic Achievement

The studies designed to measure the effect of looping on the academic achievement of students have produced inconsistent findings. Some studies report positive findings regarding the effect on the academic achievement of looping students (Bogart, 2002; Hampton et. al, 1997; Roberts, 2003; Skinner, 1998; Tyree, 2005).

For example in one of the few quantitative studies Roberts (2003) examines the effect of looping on the academic achievement of students in selected northern California schools. Roberts (2003) conducted a descriptive ex post facto study of six schools in northern California. Reading scores of two hundred second-and third-grade looped and

traditional students were analyzed. The author reported scores of economically disadvantaged students in looped classrooms improved significantly on the Stanford Reading Achievement Test over the scores of their peers in traditional classrooms. Teachers in the study also reported looping students exhibited higher reading achievement, increased independent reading skills, and positive attitudes toward school.

In Cleveland, Ohio the East Cleveland Schools and Cleveland State University joined together to create Project F.A.S.T., a program designed to increase the achievement of inner city students (Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997). One of the main components of the F.A.S.T. project was the assignment of students to multi-year teacher-student classrooms. The study reported substantially higher scores in reading and mathematics on standardized tests for students in the looping program as compared to students in a traditional one-year classroom. Hampton et. al (1997) examined the effects of looping on the classroom climate and other factors such as attendance. Hampton et. al (1997) reported looping students exhibited a higher attendance rate as compared to their non-looping peers. The study attributed the increased attendance to the extended relationship between the students and the teacher.

The positive effect on reading achievement is echoed in the Bogart (2005) and the Roberts (2003) studies. Bogart (2005) compared the performance of fourth grade looping students with their non-looping peers on the Terra Nova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in the areas of reading, math, and the total battery. Bogart (2005) found a significant difference existed between the two groups in reading and math. The Bogart (2005) study also attempted to determine whether looping had any effects when comparing gender data. The study reported that no significant difference between genders existed.

In contrast, the results of two studies by Lavender (2005) and Snoke (2007) found little or no difference between the performance of looping students as compared to their non-looping peers. Lavender (2005) focused on the results of the effects of a multi-year arrangement on the readiness of kindergarten students. Ex post facto data was collected from the Get Ready to Read and the Developmental Tasks for Kindergarten Readiness Assessments. The data indicated no significant difference existed between the two groups however a moderating effect might have been present as a higher proportion of low socio-economic students was found in the looping group. Seven of the low socio-economic status students of the non-looping group scored in the bottom category on the Get Ready to Read Assessment while one student from the looping group scored in the bottom category.

Snoke (2007) applied a causal-comparative regression analysis to the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment scores of third, fifth and eighth graders to determine if a statistical difference occurred between one hundred twenty looping and non-looping students. The analysis of data indicates that no significant difference was found when math and reading scores were examined. The study attempted to answer nine questions relating to gender effects in math and reading, retention rates, special education placement, academic progress according to gender, and the impact of looping on the academic achievement of socio-economic disadvantaged students. While all nine areas measured showed higher scores for looping students no significant statistical difference existed for any of the nine questions.

While academic gains may be small or nonexistent for entire groups of students, individual students may prove to benefit from the added time and the closer relationship associated with looping. Chirichello (2001) reported the gains of Allison, a first grader in

the Clifton E. Lawrence School in Sussex County, New Jersey. Allison appeared to be distracted and unaware during class but the teacher was able to identify strengths in Allison's learning. The teacher identified Allison as a spatial learner with low ability levels in math and language arts. Allison's teacher designed lessons that incorporated Allison's strengths and made her a part of the lesson. At the end of the second grade year, Allison scored in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on the standardized test. Chirichello and Chirichello (2001) claimed that the looping arrangement had provided the time needed for the teacher to "have a better understanding of her students' strengths and weaknesses" (p. 5). The added time with teacher and student and the better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of students is a recurring theme throughout the literature on looping and is often cited as one of the strengths.

The results of the studies that examine the effect of looping on the academic achievement of students are varied. No pattern exists when comparing the results of early studies with more recent studies nor is there a pattern when considering geographical area, student socio-economic status, or teacher experience. However, it does appear that looping is more effective with younger students as the majority of studies that reported positive findings in academic achievement (Bogart, 2002; Hampton et. al, 1997; Roberts, 2003; Skinner, 1998; Tyree, 2005) employed data from students in the lower grades such as kindergarten, first, second, and third while the studies that reported no significant difference (Lavender, 2005; Snoke, 2007) focused on older children in grades three through eight.

One recurring theme that emerges in the majority of studies is the assertion that long term relationships between teacher and student may have a positive effect on attitude toward school and that this optimistic attitude may be the impetus for any



increase in academic achievement. The student to teacher relationship emerges as a common thread in much of the literature spanning the last ten years.

### Instructional Climate/Relationships

The student/teacher relationship continues to be an important factor affecting the achievement level of students (Mazzuchi & Brooks, 1992; Caine & Caine, 1994; Seifert, 1999, Stipek, 2006; Witmer, 2005). Teachers who connect with their students improve not only the classroom climate but ultimately the student's overall academic achievement (Caine & Caine, 1994). Kelvin Seifert (1999) asserts that teachers operate in three different modes; 1) instructional manager, 2) caring person, and 3) generous expert. Seifert (1999) states "be an expert but be a person, too" (p. 155). Witmer (2005) echoes Seifert's (1999) views when he states "teachers who can 'connect' with their students are generally more engaging in the classroom and can make learning more meaningful for their students" (p. 224).

Jacoby (1994), through personal observations, found student's relationships with the teacher and each other deepened and strengthened over time in the looping classroom. Students who were once shy and reserved came out of their shell and were more apt to share ideas. Jacoby (1994) also reported the relationship between school and home was strengthened and the growth of the child over time was recognized by the teacher, parent and the children.

Research continues to show that looping strengthens the relationship between student and teacher; and parents and teacher (Grant et al., 1996; Hampton et al., 1997; Skinner, 1998). Indeed, a study by Hampton et al. (1997) reports that students from unstable environments often benefit the most from looping arrangements. Teachers generally support the concept of looping citing improved student-teacher relationships,

increased time, improved school to home relationships, and an increased sense of community within the looping classroom (Belcher, 2002; Bulau, 2007, Denault, 1998).

Seven common themes emerged from the Denault (1998) study as reported by four looping teachers from various grade levels covering grades 1 – 6. The teacher’s narratives provided positive findings in the areas of classroom community, instructional time, school to home connection, growth in the affective domain, lower anxiety, the ability to meet individual student needs, and pride in the program. Denault (1998) reinforced the importance of all of the common themes but most importantly the teaching environment and the student-teacher connection by stating, “These teachers were unanimous in their views that all of this knowledge improved the teaching-learning environment, allowing them to take their students further, exploring more topics in depth, and allowing all students to benefit from more continuity in instruction, learning and growing together as a unit.” (Denault, 1998, p. 184)

Skinner (1998) reported teachers had stronger relationships between the students and the teachers of a multiple year classroom. The looping teachers reported in the Skinner (1998) study that the student/teacher relationship remained strong even after the students moved on to the next grade level and a new teacher. Students continued to consult with their previous teacher. The teachers of the Skinner (1998) study also reported stronger relationships between teacher and parent due to the extra time spent with the students and families. The closer relationship was often facilitated by “extra community building activities” (p. 111). Teachers and parents felt more comfortable participating in the activities due to the extended time with the teacher.

Teachers from Calwa Elementary School in Fresno, California were interviewed to determine if looping had a positive effect on student-teacher relationships and

classroom learning environment (Rodriguez, 2006). Rodriguez (2006) reported that increased time between the teachers and students aided in developing student's self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of belonging and that all of these factors are considered to be antecedents to increased academic achievement and positive student attitudes. Student perceptions from the Rodriguez (2006) study echo the opinions of their teachers. Students reported a positive experience with the multi-year arrangement and cited positive relationships as being one of the most notable benefits of the program.

### Perceptions of Participants

Descriptive and perception studies make up the majority of research in the study of looping. While these studies do not provide quantitative data supporting looping programs the studies do supply valuable insight from practitioners and participants points of view. Findings from the studies of the opinions of students, teachers, parents, and principals tend to support the use of looping (Brant, 2003; Jordan, 2001; Nichols & Nichols, 2002; Sherman, 2004; Simel, 1997). Participants commonly tout increased student-teacher relationships, positive instructional climate, increased parental involvement, increased instructional time, and ease of implementation/cost of the program.

Parents showed overwhelming support for looping at the John Nowlin Elementary School in Kansas City, Missouri (Reynolds, Barnhart, & Martin, 1999). A twelve question survey was given to parents of students who completed a first to second grade looping arrangement. When asked if the parents were happy with the looping program ninety-seven percent responded that they agreed. Ninety-seven percent of the parents also responded affirmatively when asked if they would enroll their child in a looping program again and if the child benefited academically from being a part of a looping

classroom. Ninety percent of the parents indicated that they would like to be involved in a third grade loop.

A 1996 study conducted by researchers at the University of Florida in Gainesville measured the perceptions of educators, parents, and students regarding their looping experience (Lawton, 1996). Participants in seventy schools in twenty states involved in looping programs during the 1995-1996 school year were surveyed. The results of the study indicated that educators were the most satisfied while students came in second and parents were third in their satisfaction. Looping was perceived as a positive structure with benefits for all of the participants (Lawton, 1996).

Nichols & Nichols (2002) examined the effects of looping on parent perceptions of the educational environment. The study involved four-hundred-fifty-five parents from seven elementary school sites. The authors of the study used a 5-point Likert type scale to measure perceptions of parents of looping students and parents of non-looping students. The instrument measured nine subcategories of parent attitudes and perceptions toward 1) the teacher, 2) the school, 3) student academic support, 4) student behavior, 5) child's attitude toward the teacher, 6) child's attitude toward the school, 7) student self-efficacy, 8) student motivation, 9) the classroom as a nurturing environment (Nichols & Nichols, 1999).

The results of the study indicated that parent responses of looping students were significantly more positive than the responses of parents of non-looping students. The responses suggested that the parents of looping children had significantly more positive attitudes toward their child's teacher, the school, and their child's behavior at school when compared with the responses of non-looping parents. The responses of looping

parents also indicated a significantly more positive attitude toward the looping child's attitude toward school, student motivation, and the educational environment.

Sherman (2004) measured the perceptions of teachers who practice looping. The study employed a thirty-four-item questionnaire designed to measure teacher perceptions and also provided demographic information regarding the population. Teachers were asked closed statements and open-ended questions in order to gather opinions about the effect of looping on time, relationships, curriculum, stress, and effectiveness of teaching. A 5-point Likert type scale was used to measure the responses of the closed statements. The data indicated that the looping teachers perceived looping as having a positive effect on administrative support, classroom climate, teacher expectations, student-peer relationships, students' with/without exceptionalities, and parental support.

The five open-ended questions of the Sherman (2004) study supported common themes found in prior literature regarding increased student-teacher relationships, instructional time, and curriculum. Responses from the teachers on the open-ended questions indicated a "positive overall perception of looping both for themselves, personally and professionally, and for their students" (Sherman, p. 82).

Jordan (2001) measured teachers' perceptions of looping using a survey instrument designed in 1951 by M. K. Bondurant in a study to measure the effectiveness of "The Continuing Teacher Plan". The Bondurant (1951) study was also used as a basis for a study in 1971 by R. L. Johnson. Jordan (2001) reported that "teachers perceived looping to be advantageous to the academic achievement and the social development of all students, especially the African American males" (pg. iii). Jordan (2001) involved forty-seven teachers who had looped from Durham, North Carolina. The teachers were

given a thirty Likert scale questionnaire. The survey also employed four open ended questions specific to African American males.

Statistical data for the Jordan (2001) study indicated that the looping teachers perceived looping added to the feeling of security for the students and made it possible for the teacher to get to know the students better with 100% of the respondents reporting in the agree and strongly agree categories. 81% of the looping teachers reported that teacher-parent relations were improved due to the looping program. The Jordan (2001) study compared results from the Bondurant (1951) and the Johnson (1971) study. Jordan found similar results between the 1951 and the 2001 studies and listed the 1971 study as an anomaly citing a small sample size which skewed the results to the negative end.

#### Summary of the Literature

According to the existing literature, results of looping studies are generally supportive when considering the significant effects on academic achievement. Looping may provide a viable alternative to the traditional one year grouping of students due to the many positive attributes associated with looping; such as increased time, deeper relationship between student and teacher, deeper relationship between peers, increased student attendance, reduction in special education referrals, reduced number of retained students, deeper understanding of the curriculum (Hampton et. al, 1997; Roberts, 2003; Schieffer & Busse, 2001; Caine& Caine, 1994; Seifert, 1999).

As a result of the increase in accountability since the 1980's, educators have been charged with the duty of finding and implementing best practices in order to ensure high academic achievement for all students (Senge, 1991; DuFour, 2001). Unfortunately this increase in accountability comes at a time when schools are facing financial hardships and are unable to support new programs or increase staff. One of the major benefits of

looping echoed by many proponents in the literature is the zero cost of implementation. The number of staff needed to implement a looping program remains equal to that of a traditional arrangement and curricular needs such as textbooks and materials remain the same as well. Looping offers a viable and no cost alternative to high cost pre-packaged plans and programs.

The literature tends to support looping but more information is needed from those that implement looping in the classroom if the multi-year arrangement is going to be taken seriously and instituted on a wide basis as an intervention. The majority of studies cite the lack of quantitative data and the need for further longitudinal study as two considerations for future studies (Bogart, 2002; Sherman, 2004; Terry, 2006; Tyree, 2005).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

An intensive literature review was conducted and interview questions were developed based on the recurring themes of the literature. The common themes were noted in a notebook and a twenty-four item survey (Appendix A) was created based on the recurring themes. Questions for the survey were created to gather information about the three common themes found in the literature 1) academic achievement, 2) Climate/relationships, and 3) effect of looping on the pedagogy of the classroom.

#### Validity

Validity was established by a team of five educators who reviewed and critiqued the survey questions prior to using the questionnaire. The review team consisted of five educators who were familiar with looping. The team reviewed the questionnaire and recorded comments about each question. Questions that were ambiguous or unclear to the review team were reworded or eliminated.

#### Procedures

An electronic survey was sent to the 3162 public elementary school principals in Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska to identify educators who have completed a looping cycle in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. A looping cycle occurs when the teacher remains with the same group of students for two years or more. One hundred-fifty-three educators were identified with looping experience. A random sample of thirty teachers was selected from the population using a random number generator. Twenty teachers responded and were selected from the population to participate in the study based on willingness to participate and experience with looping. The teachers were



all current teachers in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. All participants had experience in progressing to the next grade level with the same group of students.

Participants were interviewed using a twenty-four item open-ended questionnaire to gather qualitative data to answer the three research questions. Each participant was asked the same questions for the interview and was allowed to answer without direction or interruption from the interviewer. Participant's names were recorded in a notebook and assigned a number from one through twenty to ensure anonymity.

Interviews were conducted in person and over the phone during a three week period during the fall of 2009. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for ease of coding. Responses from the interviews were analyzed and coded to indicate patterns among the participants.

### Research Questions

The following questions were addressed through this study:

1. Does looping offer a feasible alternative to the traditional one year grade grouping?
2. Does looping have an effect on the educational environment of the classroom?
3. Are there specific pedagogy features of looping that educators believe are important?

Participants were interviewed using a twenty-four item open-ended questionnaire (Appendix A). Participant answers were gathered and the qualitative data was used to answer the three research questions. Each participant was asked the same questions for the interview and was allowed to answer without direction or interruption from the interviewer. Demographic data collected in questions one through seven was used to determine if patterns existed within the responses of the participants based on background information and was also used to provide comparison data with the other twenty-four existing studies.

Responses to questions eight through fifteen provided information about the palatability and the feasibility of looping as an alternative to traditional one year arrangements. Questions twenty one through twenty four assessed the participant's perception of the effect of looping on the educational environment. Questions sixteen through twenty were designed to elicit the perceptions of the participants regarding specific features of looping which had a direct impact on the academic success of students. Participant's responses were grouped according to themes and compared with perceptions of participants in existing studies in order to answer the three main questions of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This study examined teachers' perceptions of looping in relation to select academic and classroom environment variables. An intensive literature review was conducted and recurring themes were noted. Survey questions for a twenty-four question interview instrument were developed based on these recurring themes. The interview included demographic information and questions designed to measure the perceptions of teachers who have taught in a looping arrangement. This chapter presents the analysis of the twenty-four existing studies as well as the results of the interviews of the twenty participants. Findings from the existing studies were compared with the narrative text from the interviews to examine any relationships that might exist.

#### Prior Studies

Twenty-four studies were analyzed for the emergence of common themes (Table 1). The common themes were then grouped and analyzed for common findings. Table 1 lists the twenty-four studies and the focus of each study. The major findings of the studies were used to generate the open ended questions for this study. Three major themes emerged from the twenty-four studies; 1) academic achievement, 2) instructional climate/relationships, and 3) the opinions of students, teachers, principals, and parents regarding the effectiveness and palatability of looping.

Table 1:

<i>Collection of Studies</i>									
Title	Author	Year	Student Achievement	Instructional Climate/Relationships	Student Perceptions	Teacher Perceptions	Parent Perceptions	Principal Perceptions	
A Descriptive Study of Loopers in Four Schools	Belcher, M.H.	2000		X		X	X	X	
Looping: The Impact Multiyear teaching Has on the Academic Success of Students	Blair, C.A.	2008	X	X		X			
The Effects of Looping on the Academic Achievement of Elementary School Students	Bogart, V.	2002	X						
Perceptions of Principals Implementing Looping Classrooms	Brant, K.J.	2003						X	
Looping and Its Impact on Student Connectedness	Bulau, R.J.	2007			X				
Portrait of Persistence in Group Looping	Denault, L.E.	1998		X		X			
Parent and Teacher Perceptions of the Multiyear and Traditional Instructional Structures and the Relationship to Student Achievement in an Elementary School	Dieringer, E.	2007	X	X		X	X		
The Advantages of Looping in Elementary Education	Espinoza, T.L.	2004		X	X	X	x		
(Re)Imagining Where No Child is Left Behind: The Relationships and Experiences of a Looped Classroom.	Flanagan, E.R.	2006		X	X	X			
Enhancing Urban Student Achievement Through Multi-Year Assignment and Family Oriented School Practices	Hampton, F., Mumford, D., Bond, L.	1997	X	X					
Teachers' Perception of Looping in Elementary Schools in Relation to Select Demographic Variables	Jordan, S.A.	2001				X			
The Effectiveness on Kindergarten Readiness	Lavender, J.J.	2005	X						
Principal Perspectives of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Looping and Multiage Education	Menconi, J.P.	2006						X	
The Impact of Looping Classroom Environments on Parental Attitudes	Nichols, J. and Nichols, G	2002					X		
A Comparative Study of Student Performance in Elementary Looping and Conventional Classrooms in Selected Northern California Schools	Roberts, J.M.	2003	X						
The Effects of Looping on Perceived Values and Academic Achievement	Rodríguez, C.	2006	X		X	X	X		
Multiyear Teaching Practices: Social Support, Instructional Quality, and Student Outcomes	Sharma-Lewis, B.	2003		X	X	X			
Perceptions of Teachers Who Practice Looping in the Classroom	Sherman, D.	2004		X		X			
Student Satisfaction with Teaming and Looping in Middle School Adolescents: A Presentation to the MWERA Annual Meetings	Sherman, L., Fitz, K., and Hofmann, R.	2002			X				
Education for Bildung: Teacher Attitudes Toward Looping	Simel, D.	1997				X			
Looping Versus Non-looping Second Grade Classrooms: Student Achievement and Student Attitudes	Skinner, R.	1998	X	X	X				
Looping: The Impact of a Multi-Year Program On the Academic Progress, Retention, and Special Education Placements of Students in Two South Central Pennsylvania Schools	Snoke, J.M.	2007	X						
Looping Perceptions and Realities at Gauger-Hobbs Middle School	Terry, L.	2006			X	X	X		
Looping in One Suburban Elementary School in Georgia: the Effects Upon Academic Success When Staying With the Same Teacher Over Multiple Years	Tyree, T. J.	2005	X		X				

Ten of the twenty-four studies (Table 2) measured the effects of looping on the academic achievement of students. Table 2 presents a concise list including title, author and year of publication of the academic achievement studies. Of the ten studies 2 were strictly based on the opinions of practitioners (Blair, 2008; Roberts, 2003) and 3 were based on teacher perceptions and quantitative evidence (Dieringer, 2007; Rodriguez, 2006; Skinner, 1998). All 5 studies reported positive results from the looping configuration. The remaining 5 studies (Bogart, 2002; Hampton et al., 1997; Lavendar, 2005; Snoke, 2007; Tyree, 2005) employed existing data and reported contradictory results. Three of the studies (Bogart, 2002; Hampton et al., 1997, Tyree, 2005) reported positive effects of looping on the academic achievement of students while the remaining studies (Lavendar, 2005; Snoke, 2007) reported no significant difference between students in traditional programs and students in a looping program.

Ten (42%) of the twenty-four studies examined the instructional climate and relationships within looping classrooms. All ten studies reported positive effects of multi-year classrooms in the area of social structures and relationships.

Table 2 shows the frequency of the eight common themes that emerged through analysis of the ten studies. One study of the ten regarding social structures and relationships cautioned that “classroom teacher continuity does not seem to affect student perceptions of feelings about the classroom” (Skinner, 1998, p. 129). Skinner (1998) continued to clarify by stating that the data indicated that most second grade students like school anyway whether they remain with the teacher for an extended period or not.

Table 2:

*Frequency of Common Themes Found in the Literature*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Stronger bonds between teacher and student	10
Increased sense of community	9
Stronger bonds between teacher and parent	8
Stronger bonds between students	8
Comfortable environment	6
Stronger interpersonal skills	6
Family – like atmosphere in the classroom	6
Increased sense of belonging	3

The third major theme found throughout the literature on looping was the opinions of students, teachers, principals, and parents regarding the general effectiveness and palatability of looping. Of these perception studies one was based on student opinions (Bulau, 2007) and one study was a parent perception study (Nichols & Nichols, 2002). Two studies were principal perception studies (Brandt, 2003; Menconi, 2006) and three studies reported teacher perceptions of looping (Jordan, 2001; Sherman, 2002; Simel, 1997). Two studies measured the perceptions of parents and teachers (Dieringer, 2007; Terry, 2006). One study incorporated all three groups, student, teacher, and principal perceptions, (Rodriguez, 2006).

### Interview Results

Twenty educators with looping experience were interviewed using a twenty-four item instrument. The interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed in a word processing program. The interview transcripts were analyzed and recurring themes were noted and recorded in a spreadsheet format for identification of common themes.

Common themes were assigned a number and recorded on the spreadsheet.

Questions eight through twenty-four of the interview instrument focused on the three overarching themes found in the literature; 1) opinions of participants regarding the looping arrangement, 2) academics, and 3) instructional climate/relationships, each theme is addressed separately. The following is an analysis of the remaining seventeen open ended questions.

### Participants

The first 7 questions collected demographic data about the participants. Twenty teachers participated in the study. Nine (45%) participants were from Missouri, five (25%) were from Kansas, seven (35%) were from Iowa and one (5%) was from Nebraska. The teaching experience of the participants ranged from 6 to 28 years. The average number of years of experience was 16.25 years. All twenty participating educators experienced a two year looping arrangement. Two (10%) of the twenty educators taught in a kindergarten/first grade looping arrangement, 9 (45%) taught in a first grade/second grade arrangement, 3 (15%) taught in a second grade/third grade arrangement, and 6 (30%) taught in a third grade/fourth grade arrangement.

Eleven (55%) of the participants held Master's degrees, 7 (35%) held Bachelor's degrees, 1 (5%) participant held a Specialist's degree, and 1 (5%) participant held a Doctoral degree. Participants were asked to identify whether or not the idea of looping

was brought to the participant or if the idea was self-initiated, eleven (55%) of the interviewees responded that the idea was brought to them with the remaining nine (45%) indicating that the idea was initiated by the teacher.

Participants were also asked to identify grade levels in which the participants had experience. Eight grade levels were represented ranging from kindergarten – eighth grade. The only grade level that was not represented was seventh grade. Five participants reported serving in teaching areas outside the regular classroom including Title I reading (3), Title I math (1), and gifted (1). The highest percentage of participants, fifteen (85%), reported experience teaching second grade, twelve (60%) had taught third grade, eleven (55%) had taught first grade, eight (40%) had taught fourth grade, six (30%) had taught Kindergarten, five (25%) had taught fifth grade, three (15%) had taught sixth grade, and two (10%) had taught eighth grade.

The remaining seventeen questions focused on the three overarching themes found in the literature; 1) perceptions of participants about looping arrangements, 2) effect on academics, and 3) perceptions on instructional climate/relationships, each theme is addressed separately. The following is an analysis of the seventeen open ended questions.

#### General Perceptions about Teaching in a Looping Arrangement

Eight questions were designed to measure the participants' perceptions regarding positive and negative effects of looping as well as any personal observations regarding the looping experience. All twenty participants responded favorably to question 8 which asked "How do you feel about teaching in a looping arrangement?" Positive responses included "I loved it", "I enjoyed it", and "it was a great experience". Six of the subjects interviewed cited positive relationships with the students. Participant two proclaimed



“there is a bonding with the child and the family”. Other participants supported the claim that looping created positive relationships between teacher and student by stating “it allows me to get to know the students more” (Participant 7) and “the bond between the teacher and the student was a great experience” (Participant 15).

Relationships with parents were cited by 4 of the participants as being part of the positive experience. Participant 5 stated “The thing that I like the most has to do with the relationships that I build with my students as well as their families”. Participant 7 cited the “family oriented experience” as being a positive attribute of the looping classroom. A certain level of trust must exist in any classroom configuration but participant 15 reported an increased level of trust between the teacher and parents stating, “I felt like I could go to them [parents] with more things because we had that trust built up”.

Six of the teachers reported looping provided them with extra time within the year or allowed the class to move faster through the curriculum. Participant 1 maintained this claim when he said, “I could hit the ground running with my kids”. The respondents also reported that they were able to get more done in the first weeks of the second year due to knowing what the students had experienced and the reduced start-up time needed.

Looping teachers were asked “How do you feel about having the same students for two years?” Five emerging themes were found in the responses to question 9. All twenty participants reported positive experiences. Fourteen of the interviewees reported specifically being satisfied with being with the students for two years while the other 6 gave positive accounts of their time in the looping classroom and described beneficial elements. One respondent replied “there are a lot of benefits to that but I think for the most part the benefits out-weigh the drawbacks”. Many of the participants had similar responses regarding the positive and negative aspects of the looping classroom stating

that the positive aspects were greater than the negative aspects. Participant 7 reported the extra time to build relationships is a positive factor and the ability to know the academic level of the students is another positive aspect.

The other six teachers also responded in a positive manner and cited factors that made the experience a positive one. Participant 2 referred to knowing the students and their needs better and stated “I knew them so well the second year that I knew exactly what they knew and what they did not know”. Seven of the interviewees reported having a deeper relationship with the students while Seven respondents reported an increase in time or the ability to cover more curriculum. Five participants reported an increase in the sense of responsibility for the students’ learning. One of the interviewees reported an increased relationship with parents.

Three of the participants did note some drawbacks to spending two years with the same students. The participants all stated that the students became too familiar with one another. One of the three participants also noted that the students became too familiar with the teacher and knew “how to push my buttons”.

Question 10 asked “What was your main reason for deciding to loop?” Participants offered a variety of reasons for deciding to loop. The majority of the interviewees cited being given the chance to move to the next grade with the current class as the reason for their choice to loop. Five of the interviewees stated that they were required to for some specific reason such as the elimination of a section of the grade level (Participants 1, 4, and 11). Five teachers stated they stayed with the same class for the students’ benefit. Four teachers reported enjoying the class so much that the teacher wanted to move up to the next grade level with the class. Four of the teachers also reported they looped with their class based upon the recommendation of other teachers

who had looped in the past. “My friend that looped before convinced me that it was the most wonderful thing she had every tried” responded participant 7.

Teachers involved in the study were asked to identify any perceived benefits of looping. Two major categories of responses emerged from question 11, classroom pedagogy and classroom climate. The two major categories could then be subdivided further into pedagogical issues consisting of 1) curriculum/time, 2) increased academic achievement, 3) awareness of ability, and 4) increased teacher effort. Three sub-themes exist in the classroom category as well, 1) relationship with students, 2) relationship with parents, 3) and classroom climate in general.

Fifteen of the interviewees cited a stronger relationship with students as being a benefit while 12 reported a stronger relationship with parents as a benefit. Participant 5 asserted regarding the increase in relationships, “the second year particularly the things that I can talk about with parents that have to do with student’s progress and about their emotional and social growth are so much deeper than I could when I only had kids for one year”.

The perception of added time and curricular issues came up in many of the interviews and in many of the answers of the respondents. The ability to cover curriculum at a deeper level and added time due to a faster start-up the second year were reported by 8 of the looping teachers. Five of the participants claimed that classroom climate was improved due to the two year arrangement. Four of the teachers reported an increase in student achievement as a benefit of looping. Participant 6 reported increased scores on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test and on the state assessment. Three of the looping teachers reported better awareness of ability levels of the individual students stating “you can tell where the students are academically because

you spend so much time with them” and “you know what you need to do that next year with all of the students in order to get them to where they need to be”. One of the interviewees stated that the teacher benefits from the looping arrangement as well because it makes the teacher try harder to reach all of the students because they feel more responsibility for the success or failure of the students.

When asked to identify negative factors of looping, in question twelve, participants identified 6 themes. Nine of the participants cited personality conflicts with students as being a negative of a two year arrangement. All teachers who mentioned personality conflicts between teacher and student also mentioned having an “opt out” provision for students who did not want to continue in the looping arrangement. Too much time together/too familiar with one another was also identified by 7 of the interviewees. Problems with being too close included bickering, only socializing/interacting with the looping students within the classroom, only socializing/interacting with students outside the looping classroom, and move in students found it difficult to fit in.

Five teachers reported that more was expected of the teacher in the looping classroom and was a drawback. Learning two sets of curriculum was cited as a negative by participants 2, 4 and 15. Participant 15 stated, “I didn’t feel like I knew the GLE’s (Grade Level Expectations) and the curriculum as well during the second year”. Three participants related that personality conflicts with parents were a problem and should be considered before one loops with a class. Participant 6 reported that finding another teacher to loop with was difficult. And participant 12 reported move in students had difficulties adjusting to the already established looping classroom and stated the new kids were treated more like guests than classroom peers.

Question thirteen was designed to gather participant's perceptions of the beginning of the second year of the looping cycle. The great majority, nineteen, of the participants stated that they were able to start the year immediately and as a result were able to begin teaching right away. Being able to start the year immediately on academic work instead of establishing routines was seen as a positive aspect of the looping classroom. Six of the interviewees reported that the students appeared to be more calm and comfortable as a result of being familiar with the classroom.

Five of the looping teachers reported knowing the students better and as a result already had an idea of the students' performance level; this aspect, like being able to immediately start with academics, was seen as a positive aspect. Students were also reported to be excited about the start of school the second year by 4 participants. Three teachers related that the students and parents already knew the expectations of the teacher and the classroom.

Participants were asked if they would recommend looping to others and all twenty responded "yes". Eight participants cited relationships with students as being the main reason they would recommend looping to other teachers. "Definitely, you just have such a nice bond with these kids" stated participant 7. Participant 13 maintained the same attitude and said, "Yes, because you will build a stable relationship with the students". Six of the teachers stated they would recommend looping because it was beneficial to the teacher. Some of the benefits cited were because it made them a better teacher, were able to see how the curriculum flowed, and knowing what is expected at the next grade level. Participant 17 stated "I learned as much as the students". Three of the participants also stated that they would recommend looping because it allows the teacher to know what

has been taught and the teacher is more aware of the student's academic level. Two interviewees reported they would recommend looping based on the time that it saves.

Two participants recommend looping because it is beneficial for students while two participants recommend looping based on the improved relationship with parents. One teacher alluded to the cost effectiveness of looping in that it doesn't cost anything to implement. Two of the interviewees did caution about recommending to all teachers. The two teachers would not recommend a two year arrangement to first year teachers or to weak teachers citing the time involved in the process and the possibility that a weak teacher could do more harm over a two year period of time.

Participants in the study were asked if they would loop again if given the opportunity and all twenty agreed that they would. Two of the interviewees reported plans to loop the next school year while one reported feeling relieved to take a year off from looping the following year. When asked if the teacher would loop again participant 15 replied, "I think so if I found the right group where I had the right connection with them like I had with that group [the looping group]".

#### Academic Effects of Looping

Question seventeen asked "Were there any positive or negative academic effects directly related to looping?" Nineteen of the teachers in the study reported positive effects of looping on the academic achievement of students. One participant stated that there was no difference in the academic achievement of the students as a result of looping. Five of the respondents reported positive effects but did not have any data to support their claim that looping increased academic achievement. Participant 18 explained "I think there were only positive effects. Unfortunately I don't have any

numbers to support that opinion but I can tell you what I saw and I saw students who normally would just float along get fully involved in the process”.

While there were some participants that could not back their claims, three teachers reported an increase in test results as a result of the looping arrangement. Participant 9 attributed the high Stanford Achievement Test results to the looping arrangement. “My class averaged one to two grade levels above where they should have been” stated participant 9. Participant 15 reported similar results on the Missouri Assessment Program test.

Six interviewees asserted that looping had an effect on student academic achievement due to the increased time and the ability to cover more curriculum. Six participants also agreed that due to looping there was an increased awareness of the student’s ability levels and this allowed the teacher to design lessons and place students in levels of curriculum that would best suit the student; this in turn was seen as a positive method in raising the academic achievement of students. Participant 7 supported the assertion that looping classrooms gained time stating “being able to hit the ground running that second year and get the students on track academically was another positive.” Participant 10 echoed the observation responding “the ability to get further in the curriculum since we didn’t have that month of getting to know each other at the beginning of the second year.” Similar to prior responses to other questions, two of the participants cited improved relationships between teacher and student as a benefit to the academic achievement of students.

Participants were asked if looping affected specific student groups such as special needs students, minorities, low socio-economic status (SES) students, or male or female students. Respondents were split on this question with 10 reporting no effects while 10

reported effects for specific groups. Of the ten of the participants that reported no effects four reported no effects at all while six chose to report no effects based on a lack of data to support any difference. Participant 10 responded by saying that there no comparison studies done at the time of the loop. Participant 11 also reported feeling that there was an academic benefit for sup-groups but that no data existed to back up the claim.

Six of the participants related that special needs students benefited from the two year structure while three claimed that low SES students were given an advantage over their non-looping peers. Participant 15 related a story about a special needs student that benefited from the long term relationship between the teacher, student, and parents in the looping classroom, “by the second year the parents could see that I had the best interest in mind for the students...the parents then agreed to testing and we got the student the help they needed.” Three of the teachers reported that low performing students, not necessarily special needs students, improved as a result of the two year structure.

Questions eighteen and nineteen were specific to curriculum and asked “Were you able to cover more curriculum” and “Were there advantages to teaching two years of curriculum?” Sixteen of the looping teachers reported being able to cover more curriculum while four covered the same amount or less. Those that reported covering more curriculum attributed this to being able to get started more quickly the second year of the cycle and being more aware of student’s academic abilities from the beginning of the second year.

When looping teachers were asked if there were advantages to teaching two years of curriculum 4 themes emerged; 1) new awareness of where students should be academically for next grade, 2) made the teacher a better teacher, 3) improved understanding/delivery of curriculum, and 4) no difference. Nine of the teachers reported



they had a new awareness of where the students needed to be academically for the next grade and often had more empathy for the next grade teacher after experiencing the curriculum. Participant 1 stated, “I definitely had a lot more respect for the third grade teacher preparing for the MAP.” Participant 9 supported this premise and offered a suggestion, “it opens your eyes to what’s really expected of them the following year. I think all teachers need to switch grade levels from time to time just to experience this.”

Eight of the interviewees reported that teaching the second year of curriculum made the teacher a better teacher. The looping teacher knew what skills needed to be covered more thoroughly when the looping arrangement was completed and the teacher cycled back down to the original grade level. Six participants recounted understanding the curriculum better and knowing how to better deliver the curriculum as a result of teaching two years of curriculum. One participant reported no advantage in teaching two years of curriculum as compared to teaching one.

Question twenty asked interviewees if they perceived looping to have an effect on retention of students in a grade level. Sixteen participants responded that looping did not have any effect on the retention during or at the end of the looping cycle. Most of the respondents reported retaining few or no students in their teaching career whether they were teaching in a looping arrangement or a traditional one year design. Four of the teachers reported that looping did have an effect on the retention of students. All four of the respondents stated that the extra year with any low performing student was a benefit and the student was able to attain a reasonable level in order to be promoted with his or her peers.

### Climate/Relationships in a Looping Environment

Three questions addressed perceptions of teachers regarding classroom climate and relationships in a looping environment. Question twenty-one asked “Did you observe any relationship differences between yourself and your looping students as compared to students you have had in a one year arrangement?” The respondent’s answers generated five emerging themes; 1) a stronger bond, 2) family atmosphere, 3) more responsibility for the teacher, 4) student benefits, and 5) relationship was too close.

Fourteen of the participants reported a stronger bond between the teacher and the students. Two interviewees reported a feeling of a family-like atmosphere while one reported an increased sense of responsibility for the student’s progress. One participant reported student benefits from the relationship between the teacher and student in a looping arrangement. Three looping teachers stressed that the relationship between teacher and student can become too close and that the students may become too reliant on the particular teacher. One teacher reported that the relationship was the same in the looping classroom as compared to the non-looping classroom.

Question twenty-two asked “Did you observe any relationship differences between the students as compared to students you have had in a one year arrangement?” Six emerging themes were noted for this question. The teachers (12) stated the students showed a higher level of concern and caring for their classmates as compared to a traditional one year classroom and exhibited a stronger bond with their looping peers. Eight of the participants reported a family-like relationship between peers in the looping classroom. Six of the eight stated the students acted like brothers and sisters. Three of the respondents reported the students seemed more comfortable with their peers and were more likely to participate in class discussions and activities as a result. The majority of

the statements from the participants of the study were positive however, 5 of the respondents warned of negative results from the peer relationships resulting from a two year arrangement. Three stated that the students became too close while two reported difficulties in adjusting and relating for new students who move into the already established classroom.

### Behavior/Discipline

One question, question twenty-four, addressed perceptions of differences in behavior or discipline in the looping classroom as compared to a traditional one year classroom. Twelve participants noted a reduction in discipline incidents. Seven interviewees attributed fewer incidents to the familiarity with the teacher and knowing the expectations of the classroom. Three reported an increase in incidents, 2 of the 3 reported that the students were more talkative, to the degree that the talking disrupted class, due to the familiarity of the classroom. Two of the teachers reported working harder to prevent discipline incidents because of the relationship between the teacher and student. Five respondents reported no difference between discipline incidents in a looping classroom and those in a traditional one year classroom.

When examining the interviews and comparing the results based on the demographic data only question ten shows any difference between respondents. Three participants with six to thirteen years of experience and three participants with fourteen to twenty-one years of experience were either placed into a looping situation or it was necessary that the teacher take the looping classroom. None of the five participants in the twenty-two to twenty-eight year category were placed into the looping classroom without them suggesting it themselves. This result might indicate that teachers with more experience were given more options when considering whether or not to loop.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if looping has an effect on the academic achievement of students as viewed by their teachers and to determine if looping is a practicable alternative to the typical one year grouping of students. The study examined teacher perceptions of looping in 3 areas; 1) academic achievement, 2) instructional climate/relationships, and 3) effect on the pedagogy of the classroom.

#### Comparison to Other Studies

Data from the twenty-four question survey was compared to the results of the twenty-four existing studies to find patterns and correlations and the comparative results are discussed below.

#### *Academic Effects of Looping*

Similar to existing published studies, the participants in this study provided positive reports regarding the effects of looping on the academic achievement of students. Nineteen of the participants in the study reported academic gains while one reported no academic effect of looping. Five of the nineteen reporting gains perceived the positive effect of looping on the academic achievement of the students but had no data to support the observation. Blair (2008) reported similar positive perceptions of looping teachers but could not provide specific data to support the claim that looping had a significant effect on the academic achievement of students. Participants in the Blair (2008) study cited the extra time with the students and knowing the students better as two causative factors in the improved achievement. This was echoed in the current study by twelve of the twenty participants.

Three participants reported having proof that looping increased the academic achievement of students. The three participants cited an increase in Missouri Assessment Program scores, Stanford Achievement Test scores, and Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores. Three prior studies (Bogart, 2002; Hampton et. al., 1997; Tyree, 2005) report similar results with quantitative evidence based on standardized test scores. Bogart (2002) reported looping students out-performed their non-looping peers on the Terra Nova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in the areas of reading, language, and math. Hampton et. al. reported similar findings in reading and the Tyree (2005) study produced similar results in language arts and math using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. As mentioned before not all participants in the study reported increased academic achievement of looping students. One participant reported no difference much like the Lavendar (2005) and the Snoke (2007) studies.

Two common themes emerged when participants were asked about positive or negative effects of looping on the academic achievement of students. More time with the students and awareness of ability level were cited by twelve of the participants. The true effect of looping on academic achievement is hard to ascertain because of these emerging themes. It stands to reason that if a teacher had enough time and knew enough about the students the achievement level of the students could be affected to the same degree.

#### *Climate/Relationships*

Improved classroom climate and strengthened relationships between teachers, students, and parents are two of the reported benefits of looping found in the existing literature. Participants in the study also reported similar experiences such as a stronger bond between teacher/student, student/student, and teacher/parent. The extended time with the participants in a looping program seems to aid in this feeling of familiarity. This

perception of improved classroom climate and stronger relationships appears in all ten studies that examined the effects of looping on the instructional climate and relationships.

Stronger bonds between student and teacher appeared ten times in the existing literature. Fourteen of the participants in the current study cited stronger bonds between student and teacher indicating a strong relationship between the existing literature and the results of the current study. Three of the participants related that students sometimes became too close to each other and with the teacher. This is echoed in the studies on climate and relationships.

Just as strong relationships between students and teachers were suggested throughout the literature and throughout the interviews of this study, so were negative relationships mentioned. Teachers often stated that personality conflicts sometimes occurred and this could be a bad thing if no alternative to the looping classroom was provided. Looping teachers recommended allowing students to be transferred out of the looping classroom after the first year if the personalities of the teacher and the students were not compatible.

Participants in the existing study reported mixed opinions regarding the effects of looping on behavior and discipline in the looping classroom. The existing literature also reports mixed opinions regarding the effects of looping on behavior and discipline as a result of the looping classroom. Most of the participants reported lower discipline incidents while others found little or no difference. While not reported in the existing literature a few participants in the current study reported a rise in incidents due to an unhealthy familiarity with classmates and the teacher.

### *Pedagogical Effects*

Perceptions of the looping participants in the literature and in the current study were overwhelmingly positive citing more time to teach, stronger relationships, and the perception of increased student academic achievement. Participants strongly felt that the looping configuration provided more time to teach due to the reduced start up time of the second year. Teachers were able to skip organizational tasks at the beginning of the second year due to the familiarity with the classroom. One theme that did not appear in the existing literature but occurred in three of the interviews in the current study was the perception that the looping teacher felt a need to work harder and had to raise the expectations for the teacher and the students the second year.

Looping teachers responded positively in the current study and in the literature when asked if the teacher would recommend looping to a fellow teacher. The looping teachers often recommended the practice based on positive experiences and perceived benefits of the program. In the existing studies and the current study some teachers discouraged looping for weak teachers citing the possibility of a student being placed with a poor teacher for two years. The teachers felt that this would put the student in academic jeopardy.

### Conclusion

The following questions were addressed through this study:

1. Does looping offer a feasible alternative to the traditional one year grade grouping?
2. Does looping have an effect on the educational environment of the classroom?
3. Are there specific pedagogy features of looping that educators believe are important?

Based on the teacher's perceptions gathered in the twenty interviews and the prior research, looping may be a feasible alternative to the traditional one year classroom

arrangement. The perceptions of teachers were positive reiterating that the benefits outweighed negative aspects of the looping classroom. All 20 participants who were interviewed in the study responded favorably when asked about teaching in a looping arrangement. It is important to note that while most participants in the study chose to loop some were assigned to the looping classroom, however, the teachers who were assigned to the looping classroom still reported favorable opinions of the looping arrangement.

Positive factors such as strong relationships between teacher and student, teacher and parent, and between peers were noted throughout the interviews. The positive perception regarding relationships was also found in 10 of the existing studies. This would indicate that looping teachers generally agree that looping improves the relationship between student and teacher and also teacher and parent.

Teachers in the current study and also in existing studies identified increased time and being able to cover more of the curricular content in the looping classroom. This extended opportunity and ability to cover more curriculum is a positive outcome for looping teachers as it was reported by 15 of the current participants and also by teachers in the existing studies. Participants also identified increases in academic achievement levels of students in the looping classrooms although they had little or no quantitative evidence to support the claim. The perception that looping increases the academic achievement of students should be held as just an opinion as no supporting data could be provided to uphold the claim.

The educational environment of the classroom was also shown to be affected by the looping arrangement. Again teachers cited the close relationships that were developed between the participants as being one of the most positive factors of looping.



Teachers reported the close relationship between student and teacher increased the teacher's ability to design lessons that attended to the students needs and addressed the various learning styles of the individual students.

Teachers also reported having an increased sense of responsibility for the learning of the students. Participants reported a family – like atmosphere of the classroom and students often acting more like siblings than peers. This close relationship did present some negative interactions such as “bickering” between the students and sometimes the students and parents becoming too familiar and too comfortable with the teacher. Based on these observations of looping practitioners looping is perceived to have an effect on the educational environment of the classroom.

Participants of the study and also participants in the existing literature have identified several pedagogical aspects of the looping classroom to be beneficial to the academic success of students. Increased time and stronger relationships with the students was cited most often by the participants. Better knowledge of the student's strengths and weaknesses was also reported in the existing literature and the current study.

### Recommendations

While multi-year classrooms appear to be a palatable alternative to the traditional one year arrangement readers are cautioned that the results are formed from opinions and observations of variables within the classrooms of the looping teacher and teachers are often more accepting of programs implemented within their own classroom. Many studies have been conducted regarding looping, and many questions still exist. Academic achievement data of looping students must still be collected and examined to determine if the arrangement truly has an effect on students or if it is simply a feel good program that pacifies the participants.

Future studies regarding looping should focus on specific areas of academic achievement of students through the comparison of scores on standardized tests. Scores of students who loop should be compared with scores of students who are not participants in a looping arrangement. The quantitative results may support claims of the practicing teachers who claim that looping increases the academic achievement of the students. The data should also be disaggregated and examined to determine if differences exist between gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

The majority of the studies report stronger relationships are created between the teacher and student, the teacher and parents, and between peers in the looping classroom. Research should be conducted to determine what can be done to build stronger relationships in a single year setting when a looping arrangement is not available or wanted. Students of every classroom could then be afforded the type of strong relationship perceived to be found in the looping classroom.

Future studies on looping should explore the quality level of looping teachers and the longevity of the teachers. The teaching experience of participants in this study ranged from six years to twenty-eight years with an average of 16.25 years. It is also noted that most of the teachers involved in the study chose to loop and thus might indicate a certain level of initiative on the part of the teacher. This initiative may give insight into the ability level and type of teachers who choose to loop.

Further studies should also explore the teaching methods of looping teachers as compared to their non-looping peers in order to determine if the same methods are being employed. Based on the perception that looping teachers might exhibit a higher level of initiative, looping teachers may also be more willing to try new instructional methods in the classroom. A stronger relationship with students and parents and a higher trust level

may be a factor in the looping teacher investigating and applying new strategies where the traditional one year classroom teacher may not be afforded the same benefit.

Teachers involved in the study identified several factors that they perceived to be related to the academic success of students; closer relationships, increased time, and knowledge of student academic levels at the beginning of the second year. The identified benefits are not exclusive to looping arrangements and should be explored in all classroom arrangements whether one or two years in duration. Vast amounts of time and money are dedicated each year to find, secure, and apply the most effective delivery method that will address the needs of all learners. Based on the findings of this study and the existing studies, looping might be considered as an effective alternative, one that is perceived by looping teachers to be effective and affordable.

## REFERENCES

- Bogart, V. (2002). The effects of looping on the academic achievement of elementary school students. (Doctoral dissertation, East Tennessee State University, 2002).
- Burke, D.L. (1997). Looping: Adding time, strengthening relationships. ERIC Digest ED 414098.
- Caine, G. and Caine, R. (1994). *Making connections: Teaching and the human brain*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Chirichello, M. & Chirichello, C. (2001). A standing ovation for looping: The critics respond. *Childhood Education*, 78(1), 2-9.
- Denault, L. (1998). Portrait of persistence in group: Looping. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst 1998).
- Grant, J., Johnson, B., & Richardson, I. (1996). *The looping handbook: Teachers and student progressing together*. Peterborough, NH: Crystal Spring Books.
- Hampton, F.M., Mumford, D.A., & Bond, L. (1997). Enhancing urban student achievement through multi-year assignment and family-oriented school practices. *ERS Spectrum*, 15, 7-15.
- Haslinger, J., Kelly, P., & O'Hare, L. (1996). Countering absenteeism, anonymity and apathy. *Educational Leadership*, 54(1), 47-49.
- Jacoby, D. (1994). Twice the learning and twice the love. *Teaching Pre K – 8*, 24(6), 58 – 59.
- Lavender, J. J. (2005). The effectiveness of looping on kindergarten readiness. (Doctoral dissertation, Wilmington College, 2005).
- Lawton, M. (1996). Middle school educators give looping high marks. *Education Week*, 16(11), 47-50
- Lincoln, R. (2000). Looping at the middle school level: implementation and effects. *ERS Spectrum*, 18(3), 19-24
- Lincoln, R. (1997). Multi-year instruction: Establishing student-teacher relationships. *Schools in the Middle*, 6(3), 50-52
- Liu, J. (1997, October). The emotional bond between teachers and students: Multi-year relationships. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(2), 156-157.
- Mazzuchi, D., & Brooks, N. (1992). The gift of time. *Teaching Pre K-8*, 22, 60-62.

- Nichols, J., & Nichols, G. (1999). Looping: The impact of looping on American schools and parental attitudes. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 8(3), 274-279.
- Nichols, J., & Nichols, G. (2002). The impact of looping classroom environments on parental attitudes. *Preventing School Failure*, 47(1), 18-25.
- Rasmussen, K. (1998). Looping –discovering the benefits of multi-year teaching. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, 40(2), 2-4.
- Roberts, J.M. (2003). A comparative study of student performance in elementary looping and conventional classrooms in selected northern California schools. (Doctoral dissertation, University of La Verne, 2003). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 64, no. 07A, 2371.
- Sherman, D. (2004). Perceptions of teachers who practice looping in the classroom. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Mississippi, 2004).
- Skinner, J. S. (1998). Looping versus non-looping second-grade classrooms: Student achievement and student attitudes. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 60-04A, 1021.
- Stipek, D. (2006) Relationships Matter. *Education Leadership*, September 2006, 64(1), 46-49.
- Witmer, M. (2005). The fourth r in education-relationships. *Clearing House*, 78(5), 224-228.
- Wynne, E. A., & Walberg, H.J. (1994). Persisting groups: an overlooked force for learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(7), 527-530.
- Yang, X. (1997). Educational benefits in elementary school through looping and Friday in-services, ERIC Digest ED 452850.
- Zahorik, J. A., & Dichanz, H. (1994). Teaching for understanding in german schools. *Educational Leadership*, 51(5), 75-77.

## Appendix A

Looping Survey

Interview #

## Looping Questions for Educators

Demographics:

1. How long have you taught?
2. What grade levels have you taught?
3. What were the grades involved in the looping configuration?
4. What is your highest degree?
5. How many complete looping cycles have you completed?
6. Describe the looping configurations in which you have taught. (two year, three year, etc.)
7. Was the idea of looping brought to you or did you initiate the discussion for implementation?

General questions about looping

8. How do you feel about teaching in a looping arrangement?
9. How do you feel about having the same students for two years?
10. What were your main reasons for deciding to loop?
11. Please identify any benefits of looping.
12. Please identify any negative factors of looping.
13. Please describe the beginning of the second school year.
14. Would you recommend a looping arrangement to other teachers? Please explain why.
15. Would you loop again?

### Academics

16. Were there any positive or negative academic effects directly related to looping?
17. Did any specific groups of students; i.e. special needs, minorities, male v. female, low socio-economic status, perform better academically when compared to their non-looping peers?
18. Were you able to cover more curriculum during the year as a result of looping?
19. Did you find any advantages of teaching two years of curriculum as compared to one?
20. Did the looping arrangement have any effect on retention at the end of the cycle?

### Relationships

21. Did you observe any relationship differences between yourself and your looping students as compared to students you have had in a one year arrangement?
22. Did you observe any relationship differences between students as compared to students you have had in a one year arrangement?
23. Did you observe any relationship differences between yourself and the parents of your looping students as compared to Parents you have had in a one year arrangement?

### Behavior/Discipline

24. Did you observe any behavioral/discipline differences between your looping classroom and any non-looping classrooms you have had in the past?