PRACTICING CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDCARE

by

Jessica M. Bridge

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Department of Curriculum Instruction
State University of New York at Fredonia
Fredonia, New York

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State University of New York at Fredonia
Department of Curriculum Instruction

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/CAPSTONE PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled PRACTICING CONTINUITY OF
EDUCATION CARE IN EARLY CHILDCARE by JESSICA M BRIDGE, Candidate
for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Curriculum Instruction in Inclusive
Education is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge
of the field covered by this project.

_____   Date _____6 / 9 / 2015_____

Guang Yu Tan, PhD
Master's Capstone Advisor
EDU 691
Department of Curriculum Instruction

_____   6/ 30 / 2015

Robert Dahlgren, PhD   Date
Department Chair
Department of Curriculum Instruction

_____   _____7 / 2 / 2015_____

Dean Christine Givner, PhD.   Date
College of Education
State University of New York at Fredonia

PRACTICING CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDCARE

Abstract

This narrative explored a director's and six caregivers' perspectives on looping or

continuity of education with young children. This study sought to answer the following

questions: What perspectives do caregivers have on looping and its' benefits? What

perspective does the center's director have on looping and its' benefits? What are the

relationships like between the caregivers and children in a looping classroom? The

purpose of this research study was to 1.) explore how teachers and a supervisor describe

their perspectives on looping with children through an early childcare center in a rural

town of Western New York; 2.) explore how looping impacts children academically,

socially, emotionally, physically, and linguistically. Qualitative data were collected

through non-participant observations and interviews. Results revealed positive

perspectives on the practice of looping for early childcare education. Participants

expressed their joy of working closely with the children at the center for three

consecutive years. The study concludes with considerations for the future to compare

this childcare center with a non-looping early childhood childcare center in hopes to

discover which type of early childcare education would be possibly considered as best

practice.

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Practicing Continuity of Education in Early Childcare

Introduction

A school year typically begins with teachers getting to know their children and children getting to know the teacher, the daily routines, and one another. The first few weeks in a new classroom together can be worrisome or joyous depending on the individual and atmosphere. There could be stressors for both the children and the teachers. For example, a child could be stressed about leaving their families or worried they don't know anyone in the classroom. Teachers and caregivers could be worried they're not going to get through their daily plan or they might not be able to get to know everyone before the first day or week is even over. Those pressures and worries could all be forgotten if classroom communities looped together through the school years. If children looped with their teachers and classmates for a second year or more, they would feel comfortable on that first day of school. They would also be able to continue their new school year where they last left off; they could skip all of the introductions. Teachers wouldn't have to worry about getting to know his or her student's; their likes, dislikes, personalities, learning styles, etc. and children wouldn't have to stress about getting to know their teacher; routines, grading system, classroom management, etc.

Looping is generally defined as an educational approach which refers to keeping children with their educational caregivers for more than two years, at which time the children move to new classrooms (Ackerman, 2008, p. 754). Many researchers and theorists alike believe that a long-term relationship with a teacher could be beneficial to both the student's and the teacher. When teachers are able to loop with their students,

they don't have to spend that first month or so playing catch up with their class; they gain

instructional time. When looping for a second year or more, children get the opportunity

to grow academically; their teacher knows their strengths and weaknesses and can

implement modifications or strategies to meet their needs. Teachers don't have to start

over with a new class and learn their strengths and weaknesses; they can just carry on and

continue to help their students grow.

According to Pecanic (2003), the educational approach known as looping could

be dated back to as early as the late 1800's when there were one-room schoolhouse's and

one teacher stayed with a group of children of all ages throughout their educational

career. Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) confirmed that Rudolf Steiner was the founder

of the Waldorf Schools in Germany in the early 1900s. In the Waldorf Schools, teachers

stayed with their students from 1[st]grade through 8th grade. Steiner believed that students

would benefit from a lasting relationship with a teacher (Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004,

p. 48). For example, according to Franz, et al. (2010), seventh and eighth grade students

who were in their second year of looping outperformed their counterparts in a curriculum

based exam. Furthermore, according to Bracey (1999), when a teacher is given more

time with their students or children, they are able to observe them and get to know them

more than a teacher who was with their students for only a year would. When spending

more time with the students in a looping class setting, the teacher knows individual needs

of each child, so that he or she can differentiate the instruction to ensure all children in

the class to succeed. Aside from academic benefits, research shows that looping can

provide social and emotional benefits as well. According to Hedge and Cassidy (2004),

looping proves how important bonding between teachers, parents, and children are.

Looping has interested me for the last several years and I personally believe in the practice and would like to be a part of a looping program one day. I have personally only witnessed this practice once at an early childcare center. Since then, I always wondered why more schools and childcare centers didn't practice looping with their children, considering the benefits suggested by the research.

The following review of the literature will explain looping in full effect; advantages, disadvantages, perspectives, along with actual studies of the looping program in different scenarios. What the literature fails to cover is the caregiver's and supervisors' perspectives on looping with young children. It's vital to know whether or not their perspectives coincide with any of the literature's facts on looping. Their perspectives are also essential to anyone interested in enrolling their child into a center or school that practices looping. I am most interested in discovering what kind of impact looping has on the relationship between caregivers and children. I am also curious to see how looping impacts children's' academic, social, emotional, physical, and linguistic skills.

This research sought to answer the following questions: how do the caregivers and the supervisor perceive looping and its impact on children? What are the relationships like between the caregivers and children in a looping classroom? How does looping impact the caregivers and families? The purpose of this research study is to 1.) explore how teachers and supervisor's describe their perspectives on looping with children through an early childcare center in a rural town of Western New York, 2.) explore how looping impacts children academically, socially, emotionally, physically, and linguistically

Literature Review

In order to obtain facts about looping and continuity of educational care, multiple on-line databases were used. For the research portion, I limited my searches to the following databases: ERIC, EBSCO, Education Research Complete, Education Full Text, PsycARTICLES and PsycINFO. For literature unavailable through the SUNY Fredonia library services, Google Scholar and Inter-Library Loan (ILL) were also consulted. Throughout the literature, I will be using the words looping and continuity of care interchangeably.

When trying to find the most relevant studies related to looping with students, the following search terms were used within the databases: "looping," "educational practice of looping," "continuity of care," "continuity of educational care," and "teacher and family perspectives."

The research articles and studies all pointed to the following themes; teacher and student benefits, teachers and students having more time with one another, increase in parental involvement, decrease in discipline, enhanced academic performance, easing through transitions, increase in attendance, benefits for high-needs students. I wanted to connect teacher benefits and student benefits together since I believe those are the most important aspects in this research study. I combined the themes of teachers and students having more time together and easing through transitions because they fit well with one another since in the teaching profession; the more time you have with one another, the easier any transition will be. I also combined the themes of increase in attendance and decrease in discipline since they go hand-in-hand with one another as well; the less discipline a student gets, the more they're going to want to be in school and vice versa.

Teacher Benefits

Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) studied the academic effects of looping regarding general education students from 26 elementary schools between the 1999-2000 school years. 612 general education (looping) students were involved in the study along with 612 general education matching students from non-looping schools. The matching sample of students matched the looping students in gender, race, ethnicity, free/reduced lunch status, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and primary exceptionality.

The comparison of academic achievement for students in the Looping Sample and their counterparts in the Matching Sample was based on the results of the norm-referenced part of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) administered in March 2000, more precisely, the math and reading sections only. After a paired-sample *t*-test was taken, results showed that students in the looping group scored on average higher than the students in the matching sample on the reading comprehension section of the test (634 > 628). The same occurred when analyzing the mathematics applications section of the test; the looping sample's average was 628, whereas the matching sample's average was 620. (M = 628, SD = 39) was significantly greater than that for students in the Matching group (M = 620, SD = 42), t (579) = 4.95, p < .001 (Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004).

81% of the teachers surveyed by Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) reported that if they were given a choice, they would like to teach a looping class again. Moreover, all of the participating principals stated that there were not any problems with looping. A

number of teachers also expressed the same opinion (Cistone & Shneyderman).

Coincidentally, most students and teachers who loop together are especially happy in the beginning of the school year, as opposed to those in other classes who generally have to spend that time adjusting to each other (McAteer, 2001). Hitz, Somers, and Jenlink (2007) supported this idea as well stating that in non-looping classrooms, year after year with new students, teachers usually spent about six weeks in the beginning figuring out each child's differences. These differences include their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and abilities. On the contrary, in looping classrooms, after the first year together, teachers already know their students and can instantly support their learning without wasting that time again in the beginning (Hitz et al., 2007). When practicing continuity of care, a brief time could be focused on introductions in the second year together; teachers and students would already know each other, so all they would need to do is just to play catch-up and move on. Nevin, Cramer, Voigt, and Salazar (2008) agreed that when teachers stayed with their students for more than a year really knew their learning styles. They understood their behavior patterns, likes/dislikes, emotional, and social skills (Nevin et al., 2008).

Baran (2010) reported that because teachers were given more time with their students, they were able to observe and analyze them longer and try various teaching strategies. Having the opportunity to spend several years with one particular class, teachers can collect more thorough knowledge and become familiar with his or her students' character, personalities, learning styles, likes, dislikes, strengths, and weakness, all of which can be used to develop proper lesson plans, room designs, schedules, etc. Baran also stated that when given the proper allotted time to learn about each individual

student, teachers could then modify the rigid curriculum to meet individual needs.

According to Burke (1997), in East Cleveland, Ohio, a project called Families Are Students and Teachers (F.A.S.T.), which included multi-year teacher-student assignments as a primary program component was created. Kindergartners from 15 different public schools stayed with the same teacher through second grade and benefited from the summer enrichment programs and school/home interactions. A strong relationship-oriented program, coupled with effective teaching and parent involvement, averts economic and social barriers to student success. East Cleveland, Ohio schools and Cleveland State University teamed to pilot the project. Since then, schools have reported major positive effects on both student academic achievement and parental involvement as a result of looping. Teachers were able to communicate more effectively with families and therefore produce a positive and productive relationship with their students.

Among these positive effects and benefits of looping is the gift of time. When teachers loop with students, they save time. Teachers were able to bond with their students more as well creating long-lasting positive relationships.

Jacoby (1994) recorded how she was nervous and fearful early on, but that shortly faded when she realized she could save time on skill assessment, developing deeper relationships with both students and parents, and the particular benefits afforded shy students (Jacoby, 1994, p. 59). When given more time, a teacher could build a close relationship with a shy student and help them step out of their comfort zone. This could help them with any social or emotional issues they are dealing with.

Teachers Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992) also believed that looping had the "gift of time." They claimed that when given the extra years with students, teachers could

implement appropriate activities and help students achieve basic skills. Hanson (1995) seconded that notion by stating that students gain social skills and strategies when they are given multiple years together. At the Willett School in Attloboro, Massachusetts, Hanson recalled being in her second year looping and how she was able to pick back up with her students and their insect unit of the very first day of school. When looking back at her teaching career of thirty years, she reported that it was the most exciting time of her life and she was relieved to discover the month of June wasn't an ending, but only an interlude.

Middle school teacher, Patricia Crosby (1998) has taught three teams of students over six years; she worked with three different looping groups for two years each. She admitted that her and her class gained instructional time during their second year together. Her students knew what to expect the second year around; they knew her scoring, rubrics, and what her assignments were going to be like, Crosby didn't have to waste time explaining anything. With the extra time given and teaching in a nurtured way really helped her at-risk students succeed. Crosby also stated that she was able to create a caring environment within those two years with her students; working with the same peers and adults helps create a safe place for everyone involved.

Kerr (2002) created a two year case study in two middle schools where groups of students looped. The qualitative case study focused on two different 8th grade groups of students who were in their second year of the looping practice with their teachers. All of Kerr's participants were volunteered after she gained approval from the school's district board. She created in-depth interviews of students, teachers, and parents engaged in looping, open and close-ended surveys of students and teachers towards the end of their

looping experience, observation through video-taping of looping classrooms, and document analysis of field notes or other artifacts collected from participants throughout this study (Kerr, 2002, p. 71).

The teachers in this study have been working together for a while and the parents included in this study have been a part of the school's community. The parents are from mostly middle class in a town of about 7,000 people. They have shown great concern for the curriculum and were in favor of building a new Pre-K-1st grade primary center that cost $11M because they saw such positive effects in the middle school students who looped.

Kerr used observations, interviews, surveys, and reviewed artifacts such as report cards over her two years at the schools. After interviewing 12 students in their eighth grade year (second year of looping), Kerr concluded that amongst the themes founded, the easing of transition from 7th to 8th grade was present. Students experienced low levels of anxiety when starting their 8th grade year (Kerr, 2002, p. 96-97). One student even quoted that she was glad school was starting and she wasn't nervous at all, because she already knew her teachers and knew how they all taught. She also stated that her classmates felt the same way; that it was easy because they didn't have to get to know one another again. She also admitted to Kerr that if she was given the option to loop again with her teachers that she would and she wished she was looping with them to high school (Kerr, 2002, p. 98).

Another 8th grader in the second year of looping claimed that he liked school so far because he already knew his teachers and they knew him. He formed great relationships with his teachers as well as strong relationships with his peers to help him

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through the transitions (Kerr, 2002, p. 100).

Child Benefits

There is a large body of research that cites the practice oflooping and continuity of care possessing several benefits. Such benefits include enhanced student's academic performance, behavior modification and improved attitudes toward school. However, Franz, Thompson, Fuller, Hare, Miller and Walker (2010) declared that, in the United States, looping was a foreign concept in many schools. Baran (2010) reminds us that the conventional educational structure in the U.S. is formed by students moving up through grade levels with new class members and educators spending the majority of the beginning of the school years getting to know one another causing less time for beneficial relationships to shape (Baran, 2010, p. 2).

In the state of Mississippi, scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) in a rural middle school were researched by Franz, et al (2010). The middle school was the only school in the district serving grades seven and eight. In the research study, Franz, et al compared 69 students who looped to 137 students who did not between the seventh and eighth grade years. In result they found that the average scores on the MCT of the students who looped in seventh grade were 612.42 compared to 586.39 of those who did not loop; a total difference of 26.03. Additionally, the average scores on the MCT of the students who looped in eighth grade were 621.97 compared to 595.48, the average score of the students who did not loop; there was a total difference of 26.49 between the two groups. One can conclude that the difference in mathematics scores between the looping and non-looping students in the seventh and eighth grades were fairly significant (Franz, et al., 2010, p. 299-306).

      Bracey (1999) also believed that more time can help students academically. He stated that since there is more time to work with one another, the teacher has more time to analyze and observe his or her students and has more time to try different strategies. When a teacher is able to observe, analyze, and try different teaching strategies, students are guaranteed academic success.

      Research has indicated that looping can increase student attendance and decrease disciplinary problems. For example, evidence collected in the research study by Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) indicated that students in the looping sample improved their attendance from one academic year to the next, while the attendance levels of students in the matching sample decreased during the same period. Between the 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 school years, the number of days absent for 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade looping students deceased from 8.0 days to 7.2 days. Between the 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 school years, the number of days absent for 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade non-looping students increased from 7.2 days to 7.4 days. This fact suggests that looping had a positive effect on student attendance.

      An increase in student attendance was just another advantage from looping. Being taught for two or more consecutive years by the same teacher also means a chance for a well developed relationship between teacher and student. The two years gives teachers time to get know their students more thoroughly and in return, students get the chance to know their teacher more profoundly. Elliot (1998) covered a Massachusetts middle school story where two teachers, Trish and Chris, teamed up and looped with 48 students. Trish claimed that she knew her students enough to know a problem before it even occurred. In return, her students knew her well enough to know what was accepted

and what wasn't.

Another benefit that children could reap from looping is stability and continuity. In the research performed by Hedge and Cassidy (2004), interviews with caregivers who have looped and parents of children who have gone through a looping program were conducted. One caregiver exclaimed that the continuity of having the same caregiver and peers really helped with transitions from the infant room to the toddler room. Hedge and Cassidy (2004) found from the interviews that both families and caregivers felt very positive about ''looping'' or ''continuity of care'' in the childcare facility. One parent stated that children can get the most consistency and stability within the environment of a looping classroom. The child is very comfortable, familiar and used to, not only to the teacher, but also to the children. Another parent mentioned her child's negative experience of switching classrooms as an infant and toddler and how it affected his naps, feeding times, and temperament. Additionally, she stated that when her son went through the looping program, it was more of a positive experience because even if the environment changed, the caregivers didn't. She was happy to report that the caregivers were able to meet his wants and needs on account of they had been working with him for so long that they knew his body language, wants, and needs.

Increase in Family Involvement and Positive Attitude toward School

Like previously stated, it is necessary for teachers and caregivers alike to form relationships with families. Seventy two percent of the principals in Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) research study stated that looping raised parental involvement in education, but only 46% of the teachers agreed with this statement. However, 83% of teachers stated that parents of students in looping classes usually have good working

relationships with teachers. The discrepancy between the principals' and teachers'

perceptions on parental involvement could possibly exist because of the fact that there are

more teachers than principals so a principal could witness parental involvement in less

classrooms than in reality.

Nicholas (2002) compared 455 parents' perspectives of their children looping in

an urban elementary school in the Midwest to those who did not. Participants were

parents with children in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade,

and fifth grade. Out of 455 parents, Nicholas (2002) found 200 parents of students who

looped and 255 were parents of students who did not. When the parents' responses were

compared, those who had children in the looping classes responded more positively

stating that their child's attitude and their own attitude towards the school environment

improved.

Parents, teachers, and students alike benefited from looping and loved how the

transitions were easy and relationships were formed. Hedge and Cassidy (2004) stated in

their manuscript that looping exemplifies the importance of bonding, attachment, and

security between a child and teacher and also allows for an increase in trust and

communication between families and teachers which in return helps form trust (Hedge &

Cassidy, 2004). Kenney (2007) agreed and stated that children tend to be stress-free

around people they already know and there should be an avoidance of change in

caregivers in early childhood (Kenney, 2007). Moreover, the number of children per

caregiver should be limited so the caregiver is allowed to form the proper bond (Hedge &

Cassidy, 2004).

Constant change leads to anxiety and stress on children as they go through their

early childhood years. When there is consistency with the teacher, strong relationships form, which allows for children to take risks and feel comfortable during early child development years (Gaustad, 1998). Hedge and Cassidy (2004) believed that consistency reduces student anxiety for the upcoming school year, increases stability, and helps build a sense of community between the classmates.

Hedge and Cassidy interviewed both teachers and families and reported that all participants viewed looping or continuity of care as very positive. One parent expressed her opinion that looping is essential for the development of every child. Others reported that they liked the idea that there is a possibility of developing long lasting friendships among children. One parent expressed her joy of looping and how knowing their "little family of friends" was fun; everyone is more like siblings in their little daycare family (Hedge & Cassidy, 2004, p. 134-135).

Looping did not just occur in the United States, it has also occurred overseas. Such places as China, Italy, and Germany are just a few countries that have practiced continuity of care.

Continuity of Care Overseas

Liu (1997), who mainly studied in China, stated that the structure of classes, curriculum, and schedules in American schools lead to chaos and has created barriers between students and students, teachers and teachers, and students and teachers. Liu also believed that multiple years together helped students form long-lasting relationships with one another. In addition, Liu also believed that multiple-year relationships between students and teacher could foster emotional bonds. When there are strong bonds between students and teacher, trust is built which can lead to an infinite amount of possibilities in

the academic world.

Reggio preschools are so special to Italy because as Stejzygier (2009) said, they put their children first and build trusting and mutual collaborating relationships with them and teach them civic responsibilities at such a young age (Stejzygier, 2009, p. 4-5). Stejzygier (2009) also stated that their whole community puts a huge emphasis on "the individual constructed with others, who seeks out others" as quoted by (Stejzygier, 2009, p. 4). Reported in an article, Little and Dacus (1999) added to the notion by claiming that by the end of a teacher's (Jean Eby) second year with her class, her shy students were confident and had formed stronger relationships amongst each other (p. 43).

As stated above, Reggio Emilia schools in Italy are known for their multi-aged looping classrooms. According to Finegan (2001), in 1946, Loris Malaguzzi, a local teacher, committed himself to the Reggio Emilia project and remained director of the school until 1985. He stated, "A school needs to be a place for all children, not based on the idea that they are all the same, but that they're all different" (Finegan, 2001, p. 82). Reggio Emilia schools aim to provide a quality education for children and to meet their individual learning abilities and interests (p. 82).

At these centers, children stay with their caregivers and group of children until they are six years old then they move on to another school. Interestingly, teachers, community members, families, and a pedagogist collaboratively design the curriculum. They meet in a council and revise it as the children grow (p. 83). Many educators and researchers from the United States have traveled to the schools in Italy to observe their philosophy. Schools in the U.S. haven't fully adopted Reggio Emilia's philosophy; however, there are many Reggio-inspired early childcare centers today (Finegan, 2001, p.

84).

At stated in the introduction, the practice of looping dates back to the early 1900's in Germany where an Australian educator, named Rudolf Steiner, founded the Waldorf Schools where children stayed with their teachers from first to eighth grade. The Waldorf Schools educated the children whose parents worked in factories right after World War I. By 2004 there were about 870 Waldorf schools in 60 countries with approximately 150 of the Waldorf schools functioning in North America (Mays &Nordwall, 2006). By having the students for eight years straight, teachers were able to meet their students needs. They became like an additional family member for most of the families in the classroom. Steiner felt that the teacher should follow the students throughout the elementary grades much like a "third parent" (1972).

In Puerto Rico, many schools have adopted the Montessori way. Seale-Collazo (2010) describes how 18 Puerto Rican public schools undertook the practice that Maria Montessori so graciously introduced to the world of education (Seale-Collazo, 2010, p. 70). In essence, the Montessori Method is a form of looping and multi-age education. In the mid-1990s, the faculty at Puerto Rico's elementary/middle school, Juan Ponce de León, decided to introduce the Montessori model. The Montessori philosophy resonated with the school's values (p. 70). The philosophy and practice caught on by 2005; 11 other public schools were beginning their training on the program. The Montessori philosophy made sense to most initial participants. Teachers were attracted to both the concept that teachers should respect children's need to learn when they are ready and Montessori's pedagogical elegance; the method uses a series of presentations and activities that build on one another and special materials that appeal to children's innate

sense of order (p. 72).

Deficits in the Literature

Research suggests that looping produces a plethora of benefits for children, teachers, and families alike. Teachers and children get more time with one another to truly get to know each other's personalities and character. Teachers are able to get a better sense of children's strengths and weaknesses. Children are able to fully know the way their teacher works with less anticipation. Furthermore, children are more likely to succeed academically in a looping program.

Although research has been conducted in favor of practicing continuity of educational care, there are still a few areas in which the literature and research have been lacking. Families, teachers, and educators alike are the most important components in a classroom, regardless of age. However, there is a significant lack of research on early childcare centers (centers for children between the ages of 0-3yrs old) practicing looping or continuity of educational care in the United States; research has only presented one study (Hedge & Cassidy, 2004) regarding looping with infants and toddlers. The following study will contribute to the existing literature by exploring caregivers and a director's perspective on looping with children from birth through three years old.

Methodology

I have performed a qualitative case study which is where one develops an in-depth analysis of an individual or a group of individuals bounded by this case (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). In this particular case, I have interviewed multiple caregivers at an early childcare facility along with their director.

I have focused my research on the director's and caregivers' personal perspectives on their continuity of care program. My goal was to interview them and find out why they practiced continuity of educational care and how they think it impacts the children's lives. The director is referred to as Miss Brown and the teachers are referred to as Miss Bell, Miss White, Miss Fish, Miss Sharp, Miss George, and Miss Smith.

Research Procedure, Participants, and Setting

When selecting individuals for my study, it was difficult at first to find teachers of infants and toddlers who looped in the Western New York area who were in their second year of looping. However, a professor referred me to a local childcare center where they practice continuity of educational care, and thus the participants were selected through convenient sampling. There are five classrooms, but the children and teachers only loop together from the infant room until they are toddlers and ready for the preschool room.

Participants

Name	Role	Race	Age Range	Looping Experience
Miss Brown	Director	Caucasian	30-40	3 years
Miss Bell	Toddler Caregiver	Caucasian	40-50	5 years
Miss White	Infant Caregiver	Caucasian	30-40	4.5 years
Miss Fish	Infant Caregiver	African American	20-30	5 years
Miss Sharp	Toddler Caregiver	Caucasian	40-50	5 years
Miss George	Waddler Caregiver	Caucasian	50-60	5 years
Miss Smith	Waddler Caregiver	Caucasian	50-60	5 years

The center itself has been practicing looping for a total of five years. Miss Brown

is in her 3rd year directing at the center and has had previous experience with looping.

Miss Fish has been working at the center for six years total and has been looping for the

last five years. She is currently in the infant room with Miss White.   Miss White has

been there for four and a half years. Miss Smith has been at the center for twenty five

years and has been looping for five years. She is currently in the waddler room. Miss

George is Miss Smith's teammate. She has been at the center for five years now. The

toddler room consists of Miss Bell and Miss Sharp. They have both been there for five

years.

The facility where I conducted my case study is located in a rural town in

Western, New York. There were 87 children enrolled at the center between the ages of 8

weeks old and 5 years old. Among the total population, 26 of them were enrolled in the

looping program; 8 were in the infant and waddler rooms and 10 were in the toddler

room. I have spent a total of four weeks performing interviews with my participants and

gathering information. Each interview took about an hour to complete while one was

done through e-mail due to her absence. All of the interviews except for the e-mail were

recorded using an audio recorder. The interviews were then transcribed using Microsoft

Word. I also observed the infant room, waddler room, and the toddler rooms for an hour

a day, three times a week, and for four weeks. My study began in March of 2015 and

ended in April of 2015. I gained consent by the director at the center along with the

teachers I have interviewed.

Data Collection

The qualitative case study investigated how teachers and director feel about

partaking in a looping program. In order to explore how teachers and director describe

their perspectives on looping with children, extensive research and data must be collected. To obtain perspectives from the participants, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant at the early childcare center. The interviews were 9 questions long. The interviews took about an hour to complete. Each interview was also recorded using an audio device. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

A non-participant observation was also held. A non-participant observation is a research technique whereby the researcher watches the subjects of his or her study, with their knowledge, but without taking an active part in the situation under scrutiny (Marshall, 1998). I observed the infant, waddler, and toddler classrooms for an hour a day, twice a week, for four weeks total. Being able to compare the participants perspectives to the observations made were crucial. Seeing the environment first-hand helped put the participants interview responses into perspective. The observations helped me further explore the purpose of this study which was to discover what type of impact looping had on relationships between caregivers and children and how it impacted children's' academic, social, emotional, physical, and linguistic skills.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the in-depth and open-ended interviews the participants were color coded, themed, and analyzed. After listening to the audio device, I transcribed all of the interviews. I then went through with colored markers to find common themes. The following themes were presented: Strong bonds/attachment, caregivers know the children so well, children learn from one another, trust and confidence, teamwork, routines and smooth transitions, and strong family relationships. All data derived from the interview answers were analyzed using descriptive narratives. Responses were then

analyzed using the constant comparative method between the interviews and the observations.

Results

Overview of Results

When reading through the interviews and searching for common themes, it was quite apparent that all of the participants expressed their knowledge and experience on looping in reference to how it impacted the children, staff, and families at the center. The following results are organized in such manner. The first section is labeled Impacts of Looping on Children with the following themes of strong bonds/attachment, children learn from one another, trust and confidence, and routines and smooth transitions. The second section is titled Impacts of Looping on Caregivers with the following themes of caregivers know the children so well and teamwork. The last section is titled Impacts of Looping on the Relationships between Families and the Center with the following theme of strong family relationships. A lot of my observations pointed to the same themes as well. However, more data was concentrated heavily on how looping impacted the children at the center.

Impacts of Looping on Children

Strong bonds/attachment. In any new relationship, individuals become acquainted with one another. They discover their likes, dislikes, fears, boundaries, etc. They also decide whether their personalities mesh well or not. This holds true with infants as well. In the beginning of the daycare school year, new infants are placed with two brand new caregivers. Over time, the caregivers allow the infants to "choose" who their primary caregiver will be. They do this by getting to know one another's

personalities and determining who's a better fit for them; who is going to meet their needs. As a pair, they then stay together for the following three years.

When I was observing in the infant room, a baby boy fell over while climbing up the slide. He started to cry while he looked around the room until he locked eyes with a caregiver (who was later defined as Miss White) who proceeded to walk over to him and asked if he was okay. He reached his hands out towards her which directed the caregiver to pick him up. It was clear that the caregiver was his primary and was later proved correct during the interview.

During an interview with Miss White, it was clear that the she held a true passion for the practice for looping and the continuity of educational caregiving. She stated that,

"Over time, the infants will grow closer to particular caregivers and will then continue to get to know one another."

They will continue growing together until they are ready for pre-school at which point, they will be strategically placed in one of the two pre-school classrooms. When asked how looping has impacted the children at the center, Miss George replied energetically,

"They [caregivers and children] have built such positive relationships with each other. A very strong bond develops when the adults are with the same children for three years. The same goes for the children's relationships with one another. A strong foundation is built and the children are comfortable in their environment which promotes self-confidence and inductive learning." She later added, "Very special intimate bonds are formed which is amazing."

Miss Bell, one of the caregivers in the toddler room, had a similar answer as well.

When asked how the looping program impacted the children, she said,

"Our children here bond with their primary caregivers so much through the years together. We become so close to them it's like we are their second mother's. Some children click and bond easier with certain caregivers while others take a longer time. But for the most part, our children thrive from it [looping]. We become such a tight-knit family."

The caregivers at this center are so close with their children. As previously stated, they become a big family. They spend so much time with the children that they really know each individual child thoroughly.

Children learn from one another. One thing I really took away from my interviews was how most of the caregivers talked about the children interacting with one another and how it was such a joy to watch them play, discover, learn, and grow together. When talking with the director, Miss Brown mentioned something that I thought was really important.

"The kids here learn and grow together, but at their own pace. But being around their peers who may be ahead of them, gives them the confidence to push ahead with them. You may have one waddler who's already running while another is still slowly walking. But then one day that walking waddler see's the runner and tries to run too. They really learn from one another."

Trust and confidence. When observing in the infant room, a couple of babies were crawling around the slide while one baby girl crawled right up it. The other babies watched her as she then walked down the slide. An onlooker slapped the slide and giggled while the other tried to crawl up the slide. When he reached the top, he paused

and looked down. Miss Fish walked over and sat next to the slide. The baby boy reached

his hands out for help and Miss Fish tells him, "You can do it, I know you can. I will be

right here at the bottom." she said as she scooted around to the front of the slide. The

eager baby boy took two steps down the slide, paused, plopped down, and crawled down

backwards the rest of the way.   Miss Fish was sitting near the slide as the same baby boy

crawled over. He looked to Miss Fish and she looked right back. She then tapped the top

of the slide and told him that he could do it. He giggled, crawled up, and walked half

way down before plopping down and crawling backwards the rest of the way.

When recalling the situation later on in the interview, Miss Fish replied,

"It's times like that that makes me smile. I have been with [baby boy] since he

was about nine weeks old. He has grown so much more trusting and confident. He used

to have to be next to me all day long. He was a 'nervous Nelly.' He is now thirteen

months old and is okay with doing things on his own if I am near-by. I still have to push

him a little bit, but it is a lot better than what it was a year ago or so.

During my interview with Miss George, one of the waddler caregivers, she explained

how looping with her two year olds since they were 8 weeks old benefited them on so

many levels.

"…[looping] really helps us build their confidence. We know them so well, as they

know and trust us in return. But seeing them grow out of their shells over the years

without having to swap caregivers is not only rewarding for us, but so beneficial for the

children.

Routines and smooth transitions. In a normal school, students switch grades every

year; they change classrooms, teachers, and some of their peers. However, in a school

that practices looping and continuity of educational care, everyone stays together for at least two consecutive years. In this particular center, the caregivers and children stay together from the time the children are infants until they are ready to transition to the pre-school classrooms. As previously stated, there is an infant room, a waddler room, and a toddler room. When the children age out of their classrooms, they move as a group to the next room which accommodates for their age, size, wants, skills, and needs.

When talking to the director of the center, Miss Brown mentioned how each group transitions without difficulty through each classroom including the big transition into the pre-school rooms. When asked what the transition to pre-school was like and how the separation period went, Miss Brown responded,

"Well, we try and keep to a tight schedule. When it's time to start visiting with the pre-school rooms, we like to start out with the children being in there for a short period of time and increase their visiting time more and more for a few weeks. We eye it out and feel it out and go from there." She stopped and smiles and continues, "The kids love the promotion to a firefly or butterfly! Having to adapt to the new teachers is so seamless."

When asked the same question, all of the caregivers seemed to have the same responses as well. However, most of the caregivers claimed that the separation period is so much harder for them than it is for the children; stating that it's a bittersweet celebration.

The caregivers who are with the infants right now stated that it was hard for them to let go of their toddler's and watch them move on to pre-school, but it was easy and fun for the kids.

Miss Fish stated that, "Our friends who are in pre-school now still call for us and run up to us when we run into them in the hallway. It's always sad though; we build such a great bond and then you have to leave them," she finishes with tears in her eyes.

Miss Fish's teammate Miss White agreed, "It's so much harder for us, but the kids are ready for a new environment. All of the transitions that I have witnessed were easy, especially the big transition to pre-school."

Impacts of Looping on Caregivers

Caregivers know the children so well. The children at this looping center show their joy even after they move on and graduate to pre-school. Miss Brown, the director stated in her interview that she constantly sees children running up to their previous primary caregivers in the hallways to throw their arms around them to greet them. Miss Brown also shared her thoughts on forming strong bonds when asked to answer how she thought looping impacted the children at the center. She paused and replied with a gigantic smile, "The caregivers here know their children so well, inside and out; it's amazing to see them interact together."

When interviewing Miss Sharp, I asked her what she thought about how looping impacted children differently. She simply replied with,

"Because we know them so completely, we know when someone needs to catch-up." When asked to give a specific scenario, Miss Sharp recalled, "There was one child in our last group of loopers where I just knew something was off. After being with him for two consecutive years and not seeing him progress like the rest of the children, I was able to detect some hearing/speech delays. Within three weeks we had a therapist working with him one-on-one."

Continuity of Educational Childcare

While observing in the infant room, one baby crawled over to a table top and helped himself stand up by grabbing the sides to pull him up. He held onto the top and spotted the prize he had seen from a distance. He tried to reach for the toy but it sat directly in the middle of the table, completely out of reach. He walked around the table, grabbing the edges for balance and continued to reach for it squeezing his hands in the air towards the toy. He stood there, looked to a caregiver [Miss Fish] and held out his hand and waved backwards. She walked over to him, sat down next to him so she was on his level and asked,

"Do you need help grabbing the toy?" The baby boy looked at her, tilted his head and slapped his hand on the table at the toy. Miss Fish picked up the toy and held it out towards the baby and asks, "Is this what you want?" The baby boy smiled and giggled and grabbed it and began playing with it. She knew what he was after; she read his signs and signals that she became so used to observing.

When asked how looping impacts the children at the center, Miss Fish replied,

"We have been with these babies since they were 8 weeks old. We have observed them every day. We know their ins and outs." I asked her about the incident with the baby and the toy on the table top. She explained, "If that was four or five months ago, that baby would have sat down crying in frustration. But he has slowly learned that we are there for him and he can trust us to communicate with him and meet his needs. His emotional skills have improved tremendously since he started here."

Because the caregivers know their children so well, they also know which activities to plan, how to set up the classrooms, how to schedule their day, and how to arrange sleeping areas. The children at the center really trust their caregivers in every aspect.

The children at the center really know one another as well. They stay with the same groups of peers for 3+ years; they grow up together and learn from each other.

Teamwork. Not only are the caregivers with the same group of children for three consecutive years, but they are with the same teammate as well. These teams go through everything together. They observe, document, plan, and reflect together. In the interview, Miss Brown happily stated how lucky she was to have all three of her teams working so well together. She stated simply, "Our teams just work."

When asked how looping impacted the staff here at the center, Miss White happily replied,

"It [looping] makes us better coworkers. Since we have to adapt to the rooms when we age-out, it's nice to have each other to lean on. We form such strong teams. Together we go through our children's developmental milestones. Miss White's teammate Miss Fish unknowingly agreed in her interview stating that,

"Our teamwork is so strong. We go through the same things with one another. Our communication is really good and we respect one another."

Miss Smith in the waddler room shared her personal experience and joy of working with the same teammate consecutively. She has worked in the daycare for 25 years and truly enjoys looping (practiced for the last 5 years). She declared,

"Working with Miss George for the last five years has brought us closer as teachers. We collaborate and plan so much more; we figure out where our children are at now and where they should be next. We document and reflect together at the end of the day and look back at our kids' portfolios. We follow everything first hand which is so

much easier than relying on anyone else having to pass information on."

Strong relationships between families and the center. Families have a huge role in their children's lives as do the caregivers. With the said, it's important that families and caregivers have good relationships. At a school or center that practices looping, families and caregivers work together for two years or more, but at this particular center, families and caregivers are with each other for three consecutive years. During an interview, one of the caregivers mentioned how families get so upset knowing they have to move on.

When talking with Miss Bell and Miss Sharp in the toddler room, Miss Bell admitted that parents get so excited when they find out that they're going to have another child and they don't have to leave the center. "The families that we work with form such strong bonds with us. They're with us for 3+ years. We grow to trust each other and have open communication. They know that they can come to us for anything and vice versa," Miss Sharp added.

Miss Smith and Miss George both stated they've grown so close to their children's families over the years. "Parents from years past still bring their children around once in a while and keep in contact with me through social media. That's when you know you're doing something right," Miss Smith exclaimed.

When observing in all of the rooms, I had the chance to witness drop-offs and pick-ups. A lot of the time, families would hang around and chat with the caregivers and observe their children. They were always smiling and laughing. When discussing the family-caregiver relationships, Miss White stated, "A mom once told me that given the chance, they would stay an extra 6 months." Miss Fish also reported that, "A couple

parents have told me that we [Miss White and Miss Fish] are like a second family to

them. I've also been told that families communicate to community members and

recommend others to come here. We have been so blessed to be able to work with these

families for so long; we become such good friends through the years, it's great."

Conclusion

After reviewing the results from the interviews and observations, I have come to

understand that children between the ages of 8 weeks old and four years old can really

benefit from looping at this center. The children learn from their caregivers and peers

who are with them for three consecutive years total. The children grow to trust their

caregiver and bond with them which in return builds strong relationships that is the

platform for a successful educational career.

Transitioning from classrooms through the years can be tough as learned from the

literature review. However, when children go through three milestone years together and

transition from classroom to classroom as a team, it is a lot smoother. It is especially

important to have smooth transitions when switching from their caregivers of the last

three years to their pre-school teachers. Since their caregivers in the looping program

instilled trust and confidence in them, they are more than ready when it is time to switch

to the pre-school rooms.

Through the observations and interviews, I noticed a deep connection between the

caregivers and the children. The children seemed to know that they were supported and

loved and the caregivers knew that they were important to the children. The caregivers

knew that the bond and attachment that was formed between them and each child would

stay with them and help the children grow into independent and confident children.

It is vital that the caregivers collaborate as a team and can depend on each other. They become a family with the children that they loop with; like previously stated, they are like their second set of parents. Being able to work with the same person and group of children for three consecutive years has advantages. First, the caregivers are able to document, observe, reflect, and plan together. They don't have to rely on anyone else passing on children's information from year to year and praying nothing gets lost.

When referring to the research question on how the caregivers and supervisor at the center perceive looping and its impact on children, the findings suggest that children form strong bond and attachment to their caregivers, which help with trust and confidence building. Moreover, children not only learn from their caregivers, but more importantly from their peers. Caregivers also benefit from the looping program in that they collaborate with each other and work as a team. Finally, the director and caregivers firmly believed that looping made parents more involved in the children's care. However, it did not describe how looping impacted children academically, physically, and linguistically.

After reviewing the responses from Miss Brown and all of the caregivers at the center, I can conclude that the participants expressed a highly positive perspective on looping. They expressed their joy of being able to work with the same group of children for three consecutive years and watching them grow. According to the director and the caregivers, the families were excited about the continuity of care and would want their children to participate in looping.

When asked if they had anything to add, Miss Bell stated that looping should be the standard instead of the exception and that even on bad days, it is still calmer than

other centers. Miss Fish said that everyone should practice looping and that it's beyond beneficial for the children. Miss Smith stated that the children that they are looping with now are going to be our next community leaders so why not start with best practice.

Limitations

There were a few limitations within this study. One limitation was convenient sampling and small sample size. I was able to interview and observe at the given center because I had worked there previously and a college professor gave the center a great recommendation for me. There was a small sample size due to the lack of centers that practiced looping around the given research area. Another limitation was the collection of data was performed over a short period of time due to a last minute research site change. The last limitation was that there was no triangulation of data. When interviewing the participants and observing the three classrooms, I had found only social and emotional development occurring between the children rather than academic, physical, and linguistic skills. Further observing would be needed in order to obtain data on such.

Implications for Future Study

I believe there should be further research in the future to compare this childcare center with a non-looping early childhood childcare center. I believe this would be effective research for families when deciding where to put their children for childcare. Future research should examine families of early childhood children perspectives of looping and how they see the benefits of continuity of care, if at all. Future research should also examine long term effects of looping in early childhood by following participants through high school graduation.

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Appendix A

"Practicing Continuity of Educational Care in Early Childcare" Interview

1. Why has this center chosen to practice looping or continuity of educational care? Are there any reasons not to loop?

2. How has looping impacted the children at your center?

3. How has looping impacted your staff here at the center?

4. What feedback, if any, have you received from the families regarding looping?

5. How do you think looping impacts children differently?

6. Do you ever get any feedback from families about your program?

7. What are the children's and caregivers relationships like through the looping years?

8. After the consecutive years with the children, how is the separation period like?

9. Any further comments on looping/continuity of care?