

**GAINING PERSPECTIVES FROM TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS
ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOOPING IN THE
ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

THESIS

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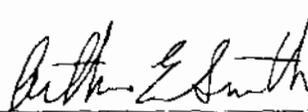
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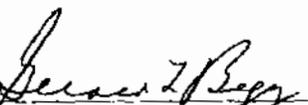
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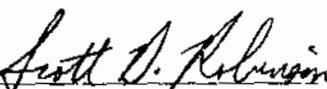
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to reveal the effectiveness of looping grades according to the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents in the Rochester City School District. The participants had all experienced looping in the past. The study analyzed and categorized responses given by these participants to various questions developed by the researcher.

Eight teachers, sixteen students, and sixteen parents participated in this study. Data were gathered from the participants through written surveys and phone interviews. Various questions about the participants' looping experiences were asked.

The research question was:

What are the commonly reported strengths and weaknesses of looping by teachers, students, and parents?

After all the data were gathered, the responses were placed into categories where strengths and weaknesses of looping could be noted.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to see if looping is a program that will benefit Rochester City School students according to the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping.

Need for the Study

Looping is the practice of advancing a teacher from one grade level to the next along with his/her class. At the end of a loop of two or more years, the teacher begins the cycle again with a new group of students. Many districts have adopted the looping program. Much attention has been given to this education reform. Looping advocates praise its effectiveness (Burke, 1997). Much of the research that has been conducted involved schools in suburban areas (Hellmich, 1995). In Hellmich's study, suburban schools have reported many beneficial outcomes of looping. Perhaps, looping is what the Rochester City School District needs as well. Some students in the Rochester schools must deal with poverty and an unstable home life. Many Rochester schools are located in high poverty areas. If looping provides stability and consistency, why aren't more city schools

incorporating it? There has been some looping going on in Rochester schools, but should there be more? By analyzing the looping experiences of those students, teachers, and parents, perhaps it can be revealed if looping should be pursued or discouraged in the Rochester City School District. In addition, this study will reveal the commonly reported advantages and disadvantages of looping in the city and how those areas can be strengthened based on responses. This way, if looping continues in Rochester, teachers can work on those areas reported as weak by other teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping before.

Research Question

What are the commonly reported strengths and weaknesses of looping by teachers, students, and parents?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to see if looping is a program that will benefit Rochester City School students according to the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping.

What is looping?

Looping gives the opportunity for students and a teacher to stay together for two or more years and share individual growth and development in all areas, such as: cognitive, academic, emotional, psychological and social (Liu, 1997). Looping is also referred to as multi-year grouping, teacher/student progression, the 20-month classroom, replacement teaching, or the continuous learning program. For example, students spend two years with the same teacher, first as third graders and then as fourth graders. Then the students move on to fifth grade and that teacher returns to third grade and has a new group for another two years. In a 1913 Department of Interior Education memo (Million, 1996), looping was

referred to as 'teacher rotation.' Although it is common in European and Japanese schools, looping is just now catching on in American elementary schools.

Advantages of looping

Checkley (1995) believes that in a looping program, the long-term relationships formed between teachers and students give children a "third parent," or significant adult that a child can count on, thus giving school a family feeling. Looping often provides a learning environment that parallels a close-knit family. In an ideal situation, the looping environment is one that produces and thrives on maintaining successful individuals and group learning. It emphasizes cooperation, collaboration, positive social skill development, and interactivity. As reported by participants in Lincoln's (1997) study, the learning environment in a looping classroom is one that encourages individual and group responsibility, independence in learning, growing, and developing into life-long learners. Along with the family feeling, a looping classroom provides a secure and safe environment to become risk-takers, an absolute necessity for learning and discovering (Burke, 1996).

Additional learning time can be gained through a looping program. Significant time can be saved at the beginning of the second year of each subsequent loop. This is accomplished by not having to repeat routine procedures

and practices, reestablish behavioral expectations, and develop individual and group responsibility, accountability and independence in the learning environment (Lincoln, 1997).

Time is gained by looping in yet another way. The two year looping cycle gives teachers enough time to accumulate more in depth knowledge of students' personalities, learning styles, strengths and weaknesses (Hanson, 1995). This longer contact reduces time spent on diagnosis and facilitates more effective instruction. If a teacher has sufficient time to connect with a child's learning styles, the teacher could wisely postpone critical decisions about retention and special education referrals (Mazzuchi, 1992). There are cases where children have been retained after the first year of a loop because the teacher feels that the child needs exposure to another year of the same material. Instead of pushing the child on to more difficult subject matter, the teacher feels that this child needs to grasp the previous year's material in a more thorough manner. The Attleboro, Massachusetts School District, which mandates two-year looping from first through eighth grades, reports improved attendance and test results, fewer discipline problems and special education referrals, and reduced retention (Checkley, 1995).

Another benefit of looping is strong parent-teacher relationships. A study found that looping can turn parents into supporters and promote stronger bonds between parents and teachers (Checkley, 1995). It can take some parents most of

the year to become comfortable with a teacher, but in a looping program, communicating with parents can be a rewarding experience (Hanson, 1995). Hanson reports that parents in the Attleboro, Massachusetts school system generally support the looping program. The parents appreciate the chance to become familiar with a teacher's instructional style and expectations for class work and homework. Parents also report feeling more comfortable during the parent-teacher conference, especially the second year, because they have a perspective of the past and present (Hanson, 1995).

Grant (1996), who popularized the term "looping," claims it makes sense because of the minimal cost of implementation. Spending is limited to new instructional materials and supplies for teachers and perhaps staff development funds to help them get up to speed on their new curriculums. In some cases, there is no need to create new classrooms for looping teachers. If there are two teachers looping the same grades but at different cycles, then those teachers need simply trade classrooms at the end of each year. Therefore, there is not a need for more room to be made (Grant, 1996).

Disadvantages of Looping

Any education reform has problems, and looping has its share. There is always a danger that a learning problem may be overlooked for two years. If a teacher is not competent in identifying a learning disability in a student, that

student is not getting the help he/she needs. Jacoby (1994) expressed his opinion that a two year delay could be disastrous for a child who really needs special services.

Furthermore, Checkley (1995) found that many teachers who were accustomed to teaching the same grade level did not want to change. Some teachers did not want to leave a grade-level team where they were already working well together (Checkley, 1995). Another study found that teachers had to invest more time in learning a new grade's curriculum (Mazzuchi, 1992). Also, teachers who did not have a choice had to tolerate the most difficult children for twice as long (Burke, 1996). In addition, detaching oneself emotionally from a class after two years was very difficult for some teachers (Burke, 1996).

The greatest concern of parents was that their child might spend two years with an ineffective teacher (Butler, Gittens, Kelly, Taylor, & Zeller, 1998). Parents in this study reported that students were exposed to fewer points of view and fewer instructional strategies in the multi-year teaching organization (Butler et al., 1998).

Another disadvantage for students is the missed benefit of exposure to another adult personality and style (Liu, 1997). Students may have difficulty adjusting to middle school and high school after being in an arrangement in which they have had the same teachers for several years (Liu, 1997). Students do not

reap the benefits of working with a variety of students. Finally, looping is harmful to children who have serious conflicts with the teacher (Burke, 1996).

Cautions about Looping

To make the process of looping beneficial for all involved, much research has been devoted to developing cautionary suggestions when implementing this technique. Here are some of those suggestions:

1. Looping of three or more years is not advised (Goldberg, 1991).

Students are so familiar with the expectations that it can lead to the point of boredom (Goldberg, 1991).

2. Much support needs to be given to teachers implementing a looping program. Some staff development may be needed. It is important that teachers are given enough materials and time to plan and organize a two-year curriculum cycle (Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996). They also need time to share with other teachers day to day planning and, later on, their experience and problems (Grant et al., 1996).

3. Another crucial component to a successful looping program is allowing teacher input in regards to class composition. It is not advisable to overload looping classes with special needs students who might benefit from the supportive atmosphere (Butler, Gittens, Kelly, Taylor, & Zeller, 1998). Looping classes should have no more than their fair share of such students (Butler et. al., 1998). A

real problem child or difficult parent should not be endured for multiple years by a teacher (Hanson, 1995). Principals who are aware of such a mismatch must separate the student from this teacher (Hanson, 1995).

4. Teachers must be willing and enthusiastic about looping to make it work. No new teacher should loop because he/she needs time to get established first (Checkley, 1995). A new teacher faces many new challenges in his/her first year of teaching. One of those is learning a new curriculum. If that teacher loops, he/she is required to learn another new curriculum the following year and this may be too overwhelming for someone just starting in the teaching field.

5. Parents should be informed in advance and ideally offered a choice among looping, standard, and perhaps multiage configurations (Burke, 1996). Parents should be encouraged to research looping teams in their child's school at the start of each two year cycle (Burke, 1996). This way, the parent can choose the best match for his/her child. The school should try to accommodate these requests as much as possible.

Findings from Schools that have Implemented Looping

The concept of looping may seem very new to some schools but to others, it is a program that has been implemented for several years now. Many schools in the United States have experimented with looping. What these schools report are many benefits for teachers, students, and parents involved.

At Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School in Hyattsville, Maryland, teachers stay with their students for three years, from fourth through sixth grades. They have seen a tremendous difference since the implementation of a looping program. Over the four years that they have been using looping, they have seen suspensions decrease, teacher attendance rates of 97%, and student attendance rates of 97.2% which are excellent by Maryland's standards (Butler, 1998). This school of 650 children is situated in a high poverty, crime-ridden metropolitan area. Every day, students pass drug dealers on their way to school. For these reasons, enhancing an environment that fosters the development of the whole child continues to be a challenge for educators. The school reports that looping has played a major role in providing students with this environment (Butler, 1998). In addition to these benefits, Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School reports many other advantages of looping. In Butler's findings, the school reports that looping has been a definite asset for addressing the students' behavioral and social development. Because the children anticipate that they will be together for three years, they begin in fourth grade to bond and to develop the concept of 'family pride'. Students initiate friendships and internalize cooperative learning strategies over these years. The teachers send postcards to their returning students just before school begins, welcoming them as family to another year together. Students and teachers are pleased to return in September of the second and third years to a class free from the typical beginning of the year

jitters and frustrations. The children know what is expected of them, and the teachers know their students' levels of achievement as well as their strengths and weaknesses. The beginning of the year runs smoothly and is less stressful. During September, teachers can concentrate on the curriculum instead of pretesting subject areas and establishing classroom routines. The English-as-a-second-language students, who speak 21 languages, are more at ease during their second year of looping because the first school day in September is actually their 181st day of school. They are more confident in practicing their developing English skills and are more trusting of their teacher.

Butler (1998) reports that this Maryland school's most positive aspect of looping is the social growth that takes place. Over this three year period, the children develop a strong interdependency. They know one another so well. As the years progress, the students show empathy, concern, and mutual respect for one another, all because they have blended into a cohesive team.

Another important aspect of looping is parental involvement. At Langley Park-McCormick School, the student, the parent, the teacher, and the administrator sign and begin to implement compacts for optimal learning on the child's first day of school. These written agreements formalize the active role each participant has in the child's performance and clarifies the specific high standards expected of all students (Butler, 1998).

In Grant Elementary School in Livonia, Michigan, looping is working beautifully according to Lynn Babcock, the school's principal (Million, 1996).

She adds:

This September our looped classes started without anxiety. Everyone knew the teacher, the teacher knew the parents, they didn't have to spend a month reviewing, and, best of all, teachers really know what makes these kids learn. That's something that may take the better part of a year with some children. (Million, 1996, p. 1)

In the Attleboro, Massachusetts School District, looping is mandated from first through eighth grades. The school reports improved attendance and test results, fewer discipline problems and special education referrals, and reduced retention (Hellmich, 1995).

In the Cleveland-based Project F.A.S.T., students in looping classes scored substantially higher on standardized tests of reading and mathematics than did students in regular classes, "even when both groups were taught by the same teacher", reports Burke (1997).

In the Antioch Illinois School District 34, findings from Burke (1996) affirm the benefits of looping. Approximately 70% of teachers in a school in this district reported that teaching the same students for three years allowed them to use more positive approaches to classroom management. Ninety-two percent of them said that they knew more about their students, and 69% described their students as more willing to participate voluntarily in class. Eighty-five percent of the teachers reported that their students were better able to see themselves as

important members of a group, to feel pride in that group, and to feel pride in the school as a whole. Eighty-four percent of the teachers reported more positive relationships with parents, and 75% reported increased empathy with colleagues (Burke, 1996).

The reactions of the students in this study were favorable as well, and they grew more positive with each successive grade level. Burke (1996) also found that parents responded positively. When allowed to request teachers for their children, 99% of parents requested the same teacher to whom their child had been assigned during the previous year.

Looping has not just occurred in elementary schools. At Orchard Lake Middle School in West Bloomfield, Minnesota, looping is being used as a three-year model. Students entering grade six are placed with the same two core teachers for mathematics/science and language arts/social studies from grade six through grade eight. Fifty-four students to two teachers has been the ratio. Burke's (1996) research states that the school reports improved student attendance, increased student involvement in school's activities, a raise in students' grade-point averages, and increased parent interest in their child's education.

In yet another middle school, looping has been said to be beneficial. A middle school in Tolland, Connecticut found that there were fewer infractions for the looped eighth graders than for the non-looped control group, despite the fact

that the looped students had incurred more behavioral infractions in the seventh grade (Lincoln; 1997).

At Cycil K. Brennan Middle School in Attleboro, Massachusetts, teachers love the looping program because effective summer learning can take place. By assigning reading or other projects between the first and second school years, students are provided with more continuity. Summer learning helps continue the momentum into the second year (Thomas, 1992). Principal, Frank Leary says:

One of the big pieces of the two-year model has to be the summer maintenance program in between the two years, and what can be offered to maintain some of the things the students have learned. When you first begin [the multiyear assignment] you don't think a summer program is an important component of it, but as you get more involved or committed, you realize that it's very important. (Thomas, 1992) .

A looping program with a good summer program can have many of the same benefits, in terms of continuity and momentum, as a year-round school (Forster, 1996). However, whereas year-round schooling is a major reform requiring a lot of selling to the teaching staff and the public, looping classrooms are a simple reform, and summer programs are as simple as informing parents and students of their assignments (Forster, 1996).

Summary

This research information was gained from schools in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Cleveland, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, and Maryland. All seven

of these places report various advantages for teachers, students, and parents that have been involved in a looping experience in both elementary and middle school levels. Much research seems to support the practice of looping by reporting improved test scores, better student and teacher attendance, fewer discipline problems, less special education referrals, and reduced retention, just to name a few. With such reported benefits, looping is a program that deserves a closer look.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to see if looping is a program that will benefit Rochester City School students according to the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study are eight teachers, sixteen students, and sixteen parents in the Rochester City School District. The city schools participating in the study are #17 School (west side), #14 School (east side), #54 School (south side), and #25 School (north side). The reason for the selection of these particular schools is that there are not many schools in the Rochester District that have implemented looping to this point. Therefore, these four schools were chosen because they all have two teachers in each of them that have looped. Two teachers from each school are participating. One teacher teaches at the primary grade level (K-2) and the other, intermediate (3-6). All the teachers have been

teaching for more than four years. Two previous students (one boy, one girl) of each of these eight teachers are also participating in the study. Four students attend each of the four schools. The parents of all sixteen students contribute to this study as well.

Material

The researcher developed a questionnaire for teachers and another for students (see Appendix A and B). Also, a set of interview questions for parents has been developed (see Appendix C).

Procedures

To construct an accurate and effective study, many various perceptions from parents, teachers, and students needed to be gathered. In order to do this in a random and fair manner, the subjects that were chosen came from all four areas of Rochester (north, south, east, & west). Only schools that participated in looping in the past were chosen. The two teachers that were chosen from each school had to have taught for at least four years. Also, one had to teach in a primary classroom and the other, in an intermediate classroom. The eight teachers who had participated in a looping experience were given a questionnaire form to fill out. Each of these teachers chose one boy and one girl whom they had had in their loop class and is still attending the school. The criteria given to the teachers

for selecting students was that the students were of average achievement (about a C student) when he/she was in this teacher's class. These students were given a student questionnaire to fill out based on their looping experiences. Students were told that only the researcher, not their previous teacher, would view their responses. Students were encouraged to be honest when responding. Primary students who were unable to read the questions had their present teacher or parent read them to the student and records their answers. When the student completed his/her form, the student placed the form in an envelope (provided), sealed it, and returned it to his/her previous teacher. When all the participants completed and returned their forms, the researcher picked them up. The phone numbers of the chosen students were obtained from the school office of each participating school. The researcher called all sixteen parents and interviewed them over the phone. The questions that were asked are on the parent question sheet (see Appendix C). The researcher recorded the responses.

Analysis of Data

After all the information was gathered from teachers, students, and parents, the researcher examined the reported advantages and disadvantages from each group of subjects. In addition, similarities of responses were noted. A list of suggestions are given as to how to strengthen the practice of looping in the Rochester City School District based on the responses given by the participants.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if looping is a program that will benefit Rochester City School students according to the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping. The following question was investigated:

What are the commonly reported strengths and weaknesses of looping by teachers, students, and parents?

To obtain the answer to this question by teachers, a written survey was given. After obtaining all the responses from eight teachers, the answers were categorized (when possible) and the number and percentage of teachers responding similarly was given. The results are shown in the following tables. Each table corresponds to one of the ten questions that were asked (See Appendix A).

To obtain the responses of students, a different written survey was given and collected. Once again, the responses were categorized and the number and percentage of students responding similarly was given. The sixteen students were

each given five questions (See Appendix B) and a table was made for each question. The tables follow the teacher response tables.

The parents' perceptions about looping were obtained in a different manner. Phone interviews were used to ask six questions about looping (See Appendix C). Two parents were unable to be reached, so fourteen responses were categorized and the number and percentage of parents responding similarly was given. The results are shown in tables following the student response tables.

Teacher Responses

Table 1

Question #1: Were you given a choice when asked to loop?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes	8	100

Obviously all the teachers agreed to loop because they chose to. This is important because much research states that teachers who are forced to loop do not have an effective and successful experience.

Table 2

Question #2: Did you enjoy having the same children for two or more years?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes	4	50
2. I loved it!	1	12.5
3. Yes, but it was hard to leave them	2	25
4. No, by the end they were getting on each others nerves	1	12.5

Eighty-eight percent of teachers agree that having the same students for two years was enjoyable. The one teacher that responded “no” elaborated on the survey. The teacher stated that the children had been together for so long that most of them began arguing with and irritating each other. It is important to note that although not often, this circumstance may occur with a looping class.

Table 3

Question #3: How have the children benefited from two or three years with you?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. More instruction time	4	50
2. Increased ability to concentrate on individual weaknesses	3	37.5
3. Adjust teaching style to meet known individual learning styles	1	12.5

Half of the teachers surveyed stated that more instruction time was how students benefited the most from looping. They attributed this to the gained instruction time at the beginning of the second looping year. These teachers stated that because students were well aware of the classroom management system, they were able to begin on solid ground. In addition, two teachers stated that time was also gained because the teacher knew where each student was academically and did not have to spend valuable instructional time trying to assess each student.

Table 4

Question #4: How have the parents responded?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Very supportive and encouraging	4	50
2. Three parents did not like the concept so I did not loop those particular students	1	12.5
3. Two parents did not support this program so I did not loop their children	1	12.5
4. Parents were more critical of my teaching the second year	1	12.5
5. Some were apprehensive at first, but they grew supportive with time	1	12.5

Although some parents were against their child staying with the same teacher, most were supportive and encouraging. Those teachers who had parents opposing looping stated that the parents were either afraid of boring the child with the same routines, or there was a conflict between the parent and the teacher or the student and the teacher.

Table 5

Question #5: How much work did changing grade levels involve?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. The physical change was very laborious	3	37.5
2. Minimal because I experienced the next grade level before	1	12.5
3. Lots of time doing homework to learn a new curriculum	2	25
4. Difficult time acquiring new books and materials for next grade level	2	25

It appears that experience is the one way that looping requires minimal work. However, if materials were readily available and changing classrooms was not mandatory, then responses may have been different from the other teachers. Learning a new curriculum cannot be avoided. Perhaps with experience with teaching both grades, this too may not be so laborious.

Table 6

Question #6: Do you feel that it was a positive experience? Why?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes, because of added instruction time	2	25
2. Yes, because I was able to self assess	1	12.5
3. Yes, because I became aware of the learning styles and adjusted my teaching	1	12.5
4. Yes, I bonded with the children and we trusted each other	3	37.5
5. Yes, it produced a true nurturing environment	1	12.5

Spending two years with the same children can produce a strong relationship between a teacher and his/her students. For this reason, along with others, all the teachers in this study stated that looping was a positive experience.

Table 7

Question #7: How did you adapt to dealing with children at different developmental stages?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Flexible grouping	8	100
2. Cooperative learning groups	6	75
3. Individual instruction	8	100
4. Modifying assignments	1	12.5

The reason that the numbers are much higher for this question is because many of the teachers listed some or all of these methods to reach children at different developmental stages. Flexible grouping, cooperative learning, and individual instruction seem to be the most favorable methods of teaching those students who are at various developmental stages.

Table 8

Question #8: What problems did you encounter? Were they solved? If so, how?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Frustration because some children did not reach their level of success – not solved	1	12.5
2. Student mobility (not solved) and the transferring in of new students – not solved	7	87.5

Seven of the teachers responded that student mobility caused several students in the class to disperse to other schools. New students were placed with the remaining students. Each time this happened, the teacher had to reintroduce the management system and assess the ability of the new student. In addition, some of these teachers stated that some of the new students were children with behavioral problems. This changed the established climate of the class and required much redirection by the teacher. Teachers expressed that it took so long to develop a peaceful and comfortable classroom environment that one or two students could change it in a negative way. To prevent these problems from occurring, many of the teachers expressed a need for incentives to keep children in the school. If students have to move, then busing should be provided back to the school. One teacher suggested that parents must agree to stay at that school at least until the two year looping program was over for their child. If the district solved this one problem, perhaps teachers would consider looping almost flawless.

Table 9

Question #9: What would you do differently if you could start all over again?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Nothing	3	37.5
2. Hold an informative meeting at the beginning of the year for parents and students about expectations	2	25
3. Utilize the summer in between the first and second loop for student learning	3	37.5

Sixty-three percent of the teachers surveyed stated that they would change something. Three teachers wrote that they wished they had utilized the time during the summer between the first and second year loop to continue the learning process. Research has supported this idea and cites this as a major benefit of looping.

Table 10

Question #10: Do you want to loop again?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. I'm out of the classroom	1	12.5
2. Yes, I enjoyed it!	5	62.5
3. Not if mobility remains an issue	2	25

If mobility could be corrected somehow, then seven of the teachers in this survey would like to loop again. Apparently, the looping experiences for these teachers were positive and rewarding ones. The perceptions of these eight teachers on the practice of looping appear to be positive ones with a few exceptions.

The tables that follow display the responses from the sixteen students surveyed for this study. Again, the responses were categorized and percentages were obtained.

Student Responses

Table 11

Question #1: Did you like having the same teacher for two years? Why or why not?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes	6	37.5
2. Yes, because she taught me lots of stuff	2	12.5
3. Yes, because he/she was nice	4	25
4. Yes, we knew each other very well	4	25

For various reasons, all the students participants in this study agreed that they enjoyed having the same teacher for two years.

Table 12

Question #2: Did you like being with the same classmates for two years? Why or why not?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes	2	12.5
2. Yes, because we can have fun and play	4	25
3. Yes, they were nice to me and helped me	1	6.2
4. Yes, we got to be good friends	4	25
5. Yes, it was nice	2	12.5
6. No, because I would like to make new friends	3	18.8

The majority of the students enjoyed being with the same classmates for two years. Three of the students who responded otherwise raise a good point. Children love to socialize and make new friends. Being with the same classmates for two years may restrict a child's opportunity to make new friends. On the other hand, four children stated that they enjoyed staying because they made good friends. They had the opportunity to get to know each other better and tighten the bond of friendship. So there are two sides to this argument. One student elaborated on his response and stated that it would be nice to have the opportunity to have recess with other classes so that he could get to know others in his grade level. Perhaps this idea would make both sides content.

Table 13

Question #3: Name one good thing about being with the same class and teacher for two years?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. The teacher gets nicer	1	6.2
2. I made very good friends	5	31.3
3. I learned a lot from my teacher and classmates	4	25
4. It was fun	4	25
5. I got close to my teacher and friends	2	12.5

Eleven of the students commented on the close relationships that were formed with other classmates and the teacher. Research supports this and states that the bond between classmates and a teacher grows stronger in a looping class because of the extended time with each other.

Table 14

Question #4: Name one bad thing about being with the same class and teacher for two years?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Too much fighting and arguing with some kids	4	25
2. I always saw the same faces for two years	3	18.8
3. I don't know	7	43.7
4. No response	2	12.5

It appears that seven of the students surveyed had had enough of some classmates by the end of the second year loop. Four students wrote that arguments and fights broke out with other classmates. Three of the students reported that they did not enjoy seeing the same faces over and over for two years. Although not all students agree with this, there may be a handful of students who feel this way by the end of the second year loop.

Table 15

Question #5: If you could change one thing about staying with the same teacher for two years, what would it be?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Nothing	10	62.5
2. To go back to her and my old classmates	1	6.2
3. Change some of my classmates	3	18.8
4. I love having a nice teacher	1	6.2
5. Not be so mean	1	6.2

Sixty-three percent of the students in this survey wrote that they would change nothing. Three of them stated that they would change some of their classmates. This seems to be a common complaint among students. In question #4 and #5, this issue of not getting along with some classmates for two years arose. On the other hand, there were several students who made close friends. As you can see in Table 15, one student wrote that she would like to go back to her old teacher and classmates. So to keep all students completely content at all times seems to be a difficult task.

Next, tables will be presented to display the parent responses to their set of questions. The questions were asked over the phone by the researcher and the answers were recorded on paper. Two of the parents had disconnected phones and were unable to be located for this interview so fourteen parents participated.

Parent Responses

Table 16

Question #1: How did you find out that your child was going to stay with the same teacher for two grades? Were you given a choice?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes, it was on the report card	4	28.6
2. Yes, the teacher called me	4	28.6
3. Yes, I got a letter	5	35.7
4. I don't remember	1	7.1

All of the parents surveyed said that they were given a choice of whether or not their child should loop. Communication of this was through both written and phone conversation. As stated by research in chapter two, involving parents in this important choice is critical. By giving parents a choice, any questions or concerns that the parent may have about the looping program can be addressed before making a decision.

Table 17

Question #2: Did you feel more comfortable with your child's teacher? Was there a better relationship formed between you and the teacher?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes, parent and student expectations were much clearer the second year	8	57.1
2. Yes, I felt more comfortable and there was a better relationship	4	28.6
3. Yes, I spoke to the teacher more often the second year	2	14.3

All the parents interviewed agreed that they felt more comfortable with their child's teacher and that the relationship was better. The topic of clear expectations was continually brought up while speaking to many of the parents. They often commented on how they knew the teacher so well that their child could not get away with telling a lie. For example, one mother told me that her child would always try telling her that there was no homework on weekends. Because the mother knew the teacher very well from the previous year, she felt comfortable enough to phone the teacher to confirm this. The teacher told her that her child would consistently receive weekend homework, just like last year. This is just one example. Several other parents had similar stories. Strong relationships between parents and teachers seem to have been evident in these fourteen cases.

Table 18

**Question #3: Do you feel that this experience was a beneficial one for your child?
Why?**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes, she felt comfortable and knew what to expect	3	21.4
2. Yes, the teacher knew how he/she learned best	3	21.4
3. Yes, the teacher focused on his/her weak areas	5	35.7
4. Yes, I saw much improvement in reading	2	14.4
5. I hoped to see more progress in my child's academics	1	7.1

One parent stated that her child did not make the academic growth that she had hoped for. When asked what she thought the cause may have been, she responded that she really did not know. On the other hand, 92 percent of the parents felt that it was a beneficial experience. In category #2 and #3, parents attributed their responses to the amount of time the teacher and their child spent together. This enabled the teacher to assess weak areas and learning styles and teach to meet them.

Table 19

Question #4: What would be one thing that you would change about the two-year program? How could it be changed?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Nothing	7	50
2. I don't know	4	28.6
3. I wish more teachers would do it	1	7.1
4. Have them read books and do assignments over the summer to prepare for next year	2	14.3

When asking this question, many parents were reluctant to answer because it took some thinking. After feeling this reluctance from the first two parents phoned, I offered them my telephone number and told them to call me if they thought of anything. I did not receive any phone calls. The issue of taking advantage of summer learning came up again. According to this survey, several teachers and parents perceive this as an added benefit to looping that should be utilized.

Table 20

Question #5: What was the best thing, in your opinion, about the looping experience?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. The result in my child's grades and actions	9	64.3
2. The relationship between my child and teacher	3	21.4
3. Clear expectations	2	14.3

Many of the parents said they were pleased with the results of their child's grades. Several parents agreed that they give tribute of their child's progress to the looping experience and the knowledge of the teacher. Parents also expressed how their child remained challenged because the teacher maintained high expectations.

Table 21

Question #6: Would you involve your child in another looping experience?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Yes	6	42.9
2. Yes, and I would recommend it to others parents	3	21.4
3. It depends on the teacher who my child had a loop with and the experience he/she had with that teacher	5	35.7

Nine parents did not hesitate to answer affirmatively to this question.

Their looping experience was so positive that they would involve their child in another looping class. Five of the parents remained a bit skeptical. Although they believed in their child's previous looping experience as a positive one, the parents would have to evaluate the teacher and the child's experience with that teacher to determine whether or not a looping situation is best.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see if looping is a program that will benefit Rochester City School students according to the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping.

Conclusions

After obtaining responses from teachers, students, and parents, their perceptions about looping became clear. Many of the participants had similar complaints and praises about their looping experiences.

The common complaint among teachers was how student mobility negatively affected their looping experiences. Several teachers responded that student mobility caused their class composition to change drastically. In addition, new students were then enrolled into the class and this caused a disruption in the education process, as well as in the climate of the classroom. New students were sometimes ones with behavioral problems and this especially put a damper on a comfortable classroom environment that took a long time to establish.

The benefits of looping that were reported by most teachers were how well they got to know their students and the added instruction time. Many of the teachers in this study commented on how they were better able to meet individual learning styles and concentrate on individual weaknesses. This was because the teacher knew the child longer and more thoroughly. The added time during a looping program enabled these teachers to learn more about their students. Teachers also valued the added instruction time that was acquired in a looping program. Many of the teachers who were surveyed reported that instruction took place right away at the beginning of the second year loop. Because teachers were aware of the students' abilities, they could start where they left off. Also, expectations and rules were already established and clear so no extra time was needed for that. Instruction time was gained during the summer in between the first and second years of a two-year loop. Teachers reported that they were able to give assignments during the summer that maintained the students' skills and prepared them for the next grade level.

A common complaint among students surveyed in this study was being with the same classmates for two years. Bickering among classmates became an issue. Some students stated that they felt restricted because they were unable to socialize with other children and make new friends.

Something that several students reported as a benefit of looping was the strong relationship developed with the teacher. Many students wrote about how

much they liked and missed their teacher who they had for two years. The students learned a lot from their teacher and in the process, developed a close relationship.

After interviewing the parents in this study, the common complaint appeared to be why aren't more teachers looping. Apparently, all the parents found their child's looping experience to be a positive and rewarding one. Many of them expressed an interest in involving their child in another looping program.

When inquiring about the major benefits of looping, parents gave similar responses. Quite often, parents stated that student and parent expectations were clearer. Also, there was a stronger and more comfortable relationship with the teacher. Parents frequently talked about how they felt close to the teacher, instead of feeling intimidated by him/her. The lines of communication between the teacher and parent were always open, especially the second year.

Implications for Classroom Use

Looping is a program that is being considered by many Rochester City Schools. Before implementing it, it is important to take into account what aspects can be improved to make looping more effective. In order to do this, one should gain insight from teachers, students, and parents who have experienced a looping program before. By obtaining perceptions from these people, schools can concentrate on those reported weak areas of looping. Efforts can then be taken to

strengthen the weak areas. In this manner, teachers can have a successful and effective looping experience for themselves, their students, and the parents of their students.

Suggestions for Future Study

It would be beneficial to research ways to strengthen the weak areas reported by teachers, students, and parents in this study. There may be several different methods to explore for fixing these areas. Those methods could then be employed by schools to strengthen the practice of looping.

Also, a more standardized measurement tool for the success of looping may be utilized. Assessments can be given to measure academic growth of looping students compared to non-looping students.

In addition, it may be interesting to replicate this study beyond elementary school to see if looping would benefit middle or high school students. In Minnesota and Connecticut (see chapter II), there are middle schools that loop. A study could obtain perceptions from teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping in the middle schools.

Concluding Statement

Looping is a program that can be very beneficial for students. Many teachers, students, and parents who have experienced looping report several

benefits. If the weak areas were somehow strengthened, looping can provide structure and stability for children in the Rochester City School District.

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Appendix A

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

As part of my thesis, I am acquiring information about your looping experience. Please be honest and answer all the questions. Thank you for all your help.

1. Were you given a choice when asked to loop?
2. Did you enjoy having the same children for two or more years?
3. How have the children benefited from two or three years with you?
4. How have the parents responded?
5. How much work did changing grade levels involve?
6. Do you feel that it was a positive experience? Why?
7. How did you adapt to dealing with children at different developmental stages?

Appendix A continued

8. What problems did you encounter? Were they solved? If so, how?

9. What would you do differently if you could start all over again?

10. Do you want to loop again?

Additional comments:

Appendix B Student Questionnaire

Directions: Please answer all the questions as best as you can. Do not worry about perfect spelling. Be honest. When you are done answering all the questions, place the paper in the envelope and lick it shut. Thanks!

1. Did you like having the same teacher for two years? Why or why not?

2. Did you like being with the same classmates for two years? Why or why not?

3. Name one **good** thing about being with the same class and teacher for two years. _____

4. Name one **bad** thing about being with the same class and teacher for two years. _____

5. If you could change one thing about staying with the same teacher for two years, what would it be? _____

Appendix C

Parent Interview Questions

1. How did you find out that your child was going to stay with the same teacher for two grades? Were you given a choice?
2. Did you feel more comfortable with your child's teacher? Was there a better relationship formed between you and the teacher?
3. Do you feel that this experience was a beneficial one for your child? Why?
4. What would be one thing that you would change about the two-year program?
How could it be changed?
5. What was the best thing, in your opinion, about the looping experience?
6. Would you involve your child in another looping experience?