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Brandon K. Carroll

May, 2012

A STUDY TO INFORM PRINCIPALS ABOUT AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN,
LOOPING, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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May, 2012

DEDICATION

This Doctoral Thesis is dedicated to my outstanding parents, Tony and Julie Carroll. You made me who I am! You taught me that the number one key to success in life is all about capitalizing on the intrinsic rewards that we get when we do something good. Because of this, I am able to be so happy in all that I do. You taught me to find the best in all people and to learn something from everyone. The two of you were my first ‘teachers’ who taught me that learning is an amazing thing and have inspired me to become who I am. Your support and advocacy throughout my life has allowed me to take the necessary risks that I have had to take in my life, and for that, I am forever grateful. With absolute love and sincere appreciation, I thank you!

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A STUDY TO INFORM PRINCIPALS ABOUT AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN,
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ABSTRACT

With No Child Left Behind (2001), annual yearly progress, and high stakes testing, administrators must implement structures and processes that maximize the learning time. In addition, with a growing number of at-risk students, English Language Learners, and economically disadvantaged students, teachers must implement best practices with the latest research in the creation of a classroom climate that allows students to take risks. This has developed the need for looping, when students remain with their teacher(s) for more than one year to ensure academic success and stronger relationships. This study addressed the effects of looping in grades five and six on maximizing learning time and strengthening the relationship between the teacher and students by addressing the following questions: (1) Do statistical differences exist in reading comprehension achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping than those who did not? (2) Do statistical differences exist in mathematics achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping than those who did not? Archival data of the AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure, or General Outcome Measure, were collected from the beginning of the year in fifth grade and compared to the middle of the year in sixth grade. The gain scores were calculated using a T-Test was to compare the growth of the looping group versus the non-looping group. The AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure (Reading MAZE) data indicated for research question one was to accept the hypothesis for there was no statistical significance between the looping and non-looping group. The AIMSweb

Universal Curriculum Based Measure (Mathematics CBM) data indicated for research question two was to accept the hypothesis for there was a statistical significance between the looping and non-looping group. Recommendations for future research include: optimal length for looping, optimal age to loop, adding qualitative data, and implications of extra learning time.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

Overview

For generations, stories have been told of students coming to campus, doing their job as a student, and then leaving to go home. If a student management problem were to develop at campus, the ethos was that whatever the consequence was at campus, the consequence at home would be worse. Today, the phrase ‘in loco parentis’ has a different meaning than the term did in the past. It used to have a proactive meaning of support for the teacher and campus, because campus was acting as the parents. As the family unit and the educational system have evolved, the phrase has come to take a more reactive approach. Today, the phrase is used as a justification tool for campus s to use with parents on why a decision has been made that affects their child.

In today’s educational setting, the proverbial pendulum has swung in the extreme opposite direction. The social norm in schools has become two-fold: the students now have a large voice in the daily operations of the campus, and secondly, campus officials now operate with the notion that students will be given respect once respect has been earned. Campus officials are now having to demonstrate and create a relationship of mutual respect within the student-to-teacher or student-to-administrator relationship rather than simply expecting the student to be respectful because the teacher is the adult.

Each student and each situation is different. In an effort to overcome this obstacle, schools today must make relationship building a number one priority within the campus’s overall Discipline Management System.

Structured student management programs have relationship building as the central focus throughout the entire context of the program (McLure, 2010). This has created the need to educate every adult involved on the importance of creating a ‘safe zone,’ or a feeling of being mentally and physically safe, within our schools for the students.

Understanding this, it becomes necessary to ask, “Do we want to make kids behave, or get them to want to behave” (Fay & Funk, 1995, p. 66)? In theory, the goal is to have students want to behave; however, in practice, teachers often find themselves in power struggles and must spend too much time trying to force students to behave.

Fay and Funk (1995) continue to challenge the thinking on discipline and student management by pointing out that “it can be what we do *with* kids rather than what we do *to* kids” (p. 66). It becomes imperative that we understand the importance of, and the believing in, the concept of relationship building. We must overcome the barriers and bridge the gaps between school, home, and individuals. Parents need to have trust in school, and the school must prove themselves by building that trust.

In the era of celebrating everyone’s differences and having campaigns to rid campus of ‘bullies’ or ‘bully-type’ attitudes and actions, creating a safe-zone is a mandatory part of any successful school’s climate. Staff developments of all types educate and train educators on the notion of creating a climate of trust, because “for students to be able to take the risks required of them to be sources of learning, they need classrooms that feel safe” (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2005, p. 330).

As the instructional leader of the school, the principal must put policies into place that call for the creation of this climate of trust (Leithword, 2010; Marzano, 2005). With the pressures of high-stakes state testing, Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), and No Child

Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), schools do not have the time to spend learning a scripted program that has to be learned and relearned every year as the new school year starts with new students and staff. And because of this, the principal and staff alike must buy into the notion of creating this culture and climate of trust and hold all accountable for its success (Cotton, 2005).

It has been concluded and research confirms that students who are valued by teachers and feel a sense of belonging as part of their campus perform better academically (ASCD, 2009; Fay & Funk, 1995; Liesves & Miller, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Sattin-Bajaj, 2010), and must put structures into place that allow for this to happen.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of looping in an intermediate campus (grades five and six) in the area of academic growth. Looping, in this case, occurs when an assigned set of grade five students have the same classroom teachers for reading and mathematics in grade five and then again in grade six. The goal was to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between a looping classroom and an academic gain in (a) reading and in (b) mathematics using the AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure, or General Outcome Measure

Statement of the Problem

The beginning of the school year is a time of uncertainty and, because of this, a time filled with stress and anxiety. At the start of each school year, the teacher has to understand each individual student as a person, as well as, where they are academically, and each student's individual learning modality in order to successfully meet the students' educational needs. There is a clear and constant concern about the lack of time

regarding the requirements within campus s and classrooms that can either promote or hinder the teacher's ability to maximize learning (ASCD, 2009).

We know that for learning to be maximized students must take risks. "For students to be able to take the risks required of them to be sources of learning, they need classrooms that feel safe" (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2005, p. 330). For this to happen in a 176 day school year, relationships between students and teachers must be built and must be built quickly.

Students know the shame of not belonging. Educators are forced to become advocates for social justice by peeling back the proverbial onion and getting down to the root causes that are hindering students' learning. Marshall and Oliva (2010) argues, "The challenges of demographics and of inequities are chronic and remain unresolved by the piled-on years of traditional practice, scholarship, theory, and professional training in educational administration" (p. 11). The authors continue to argue that, "we must move outside the school building and the ordinary central office routines. We must prevail despite attempts by opposing forces to shelter reassuring viewpoints and protect entrenched privileges" (p. 326). For schools to have an impact, all bridges should be constructed and protected from being burned down.

Significance of the Study

Little research has been done on looping in the intermediate grades, or, the teacher-to-student relationship that occurs in the intermediate grades; therefore this study has a capacity to make contributions to the literature in this area and the overall impact of the quality of education for the intermediate grades. Most of the current research conducted focuses on looping at the elementary level. This study will "help people

understand the enormously complex institution of the school” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 32). Within this complexity, looping adds an additional level. This study will help superintendents, campus administrators, teachers, and those involved in teacher preparation programs further understand the benefits of looping and the strong need for relationships in order to raise student achievement.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires a stronger accountability for academic achievement results. Individual states have been afforded the task to have an accountability system that meets this requirement. Within each state, school districts and individual schools are held accountable to the state for academic achievement and are required to have in place an accountability process. To maximize academic achievement, schools have looked to educational research for answers (Burke, 1997; ECS, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1993; Grant et al., 1996).

Current research has shown that looping can help to provide a learning environment where students are part of a community, where they are supported and challenged, and where they will increase their academic achievement (Burke, 1996; Grant et al., 1996; Hampton, 1997; Newberg, 1995; Shneyderman, 2000; Westheimer, 1996). Classrooms that become learning communities offer students support and guidance so that they may learn to become successful (Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004; Grant et al., 1996; Newberg, 1995; Westheimer, 1996). Within this type of classroom, students are developing skills such as communication, problem solving, motivation, and responsibility. For the at-risk student, the looped classroom can become a stable and supportive environment for those who are without a stable and supportive home environment (Berlin, 1996; Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988; Checkley, 1995;

Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000; Newberg, 1995). In addition, providing stability within the classroom, looping may offer students a less anxious learning environment (Grant et al., 1996) where they can build relationships (Burke, 1996; Casey, 2007) and learn to succeed in school (Casey, 2007; Rasmussen, 1998).

This study also has the capacity to provide important information for school training programs within the district or at the university level to help current and prospective administrators develop a school's vision for student success.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

Research Question One:

Do statistical differences exist in reading comprehension achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping and those who did not?

Research Question Two:

Do statistical differences exist in mathematics achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping and those who did not?

Definition of Terms

- 1. Looping** – A pedagogical design model when a specific teachers moves with the same specific set of students from one grade-level to the next (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996) that is implemented through the master schedule.

2. **Intermediate** – In this study, intermediate refers to the instructional arrangement of a campus containing only grade five and grade six.

Overview of Methodology

The design of the study utilized archival data. The data was used to compare a group of students within a looping environment within School A to those that are not within a looping environment in School B. Each campus is required to complete an AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure, or General Outcome Measure. The collected data in reading and math from the beginning of the year in fifth grade and the middle of the year sixth grade results were used in this study.

The AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure or General Outcome Measure is routinely used in conjunction with a school's Response to Intervention (RTI) model. According to Pearson Education,

Within AIMSweb there are several assessments available to monitor students' progress within the area of mathematics. Mathematics Computation (M-COMP) assesses basic computation skills, while Mathematics Concepts & Applications (M-CAP) assesses the application of several concepts within the area of mathematics. Both of these assessments are designed for universal screening (also referred to as benchmarking) as well as more frequent progress monitoring. AIMSweb also provides single skill computation probes (called Math Facts) such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division that are designed to compliment M-COMP for frequent progress monitoring. (p. 1)

For reading, the Lexile Framework accurately matches readers with books and instructional resources by measuring both reading ability and text complexity on the same

developmental scale. Unlike other systems, the Lexile Framework evaluates reading ability based on actual assessments, rather than generalized age or grade levels.

Organization of the Study

This study contains five chapters. Chapter One includes the introduction, purpose of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, hypotheses, definition of terms, and overview of methodology.

Chapter Two reviews the related literature. The review of literature includes the need for change, the learning structure and anxiety, social benefits through relationships, the looping concept, framework of looping, and studies directly related including studies with positive results, and studies with unfavorable results or concerns.

Chapter Three describes the methodology that was used in this study. The methodology includes the rationale for research methods, the research questions, the research design, sample description, sample information, instrumentation, procedures and time frame, the data analysis, and the limitations or threats to the study.

Chapter Four describes the results and findings of this study. It includes the student descriptions and an analysis of the data and concludes with the findings.

Chapter Five contains conclusions and a summary of the findings. It includes a restatement of the problem, a summary of the study, the limitations to the study, the impact that looping has, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

This review of literature presents available research in reference to the educational practice of looping students and teachers. Looping, a pedagogical design model, involves a specific teacher moving with the same set of students from one grade level to the next (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996).

The Need for Change

Uline (2001) reminds us that campuses are forever changing. Campuses are constantly under a large number of internal and external factors constantly fueling this need for change. Educators understand this. Educators understand the importance of maximizing every learning opportunity without adding additional often time consuming practices. We understand the need to consider the big picture and then create a concise and precise academic program. Bamburg and Andrews (1990) reminds us that instructional leadership focuses predominately on the role of the campus principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction on the campus. Traditionally, educational reform and restructuring is taking federal money and implementing a U.S. Department of Education-approved comprehensive reform model (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This works to create a framework within the campus , but it still leaves gaps such as time-on-task, classroom climate, and relationship building.

Glatter and Kydd (2003) believe that successful learning cultures are, “logically incompatible with the notion of ‘best practice’” (p. 236). As we continue these

adjustments towards reform, we must continue to implement, and then evaluate the implementation. “Relying on what others (or collection of others) claim works ‘best’ denies the place of context and learning through experimentation, and inevitable failures associated with trying something new” (Walker and Quong, 2005, p. 111). “This suggests that the potential for learning from unsuccessful practice may be at least as great as that from practice which is perceived to have been successful” (Glatter & Kydd, p. 237). In effort to combat these three very important issues, many educational administrators are revisiting the concept of looping.

The Learning Structure and Anxiety

All students, at one time or another will experience anxiety, or “general uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, a feeling of tension” (Hansen, 1997, p. 91). There are many effects of anxiety and some can be positive. Regardless, the negative effects can be devastating. We know that:

“From the time of the earliest work on this problem, starting with the pioneering work of Yerkes and Dodson (1908), to the present day, researchers have consistently reported a negative correlation between virtually every aspect of campus achievement and a wide range of anxiety measures” (Covington & Omelich, 1987, p. 393)

Hoy and Hoy (2006) asserts that, “Anxiety can be both a cause and an effect of campus failure: students do poorly because they are anxious, and their poor performance increases their anxiety” (p. 154). For a school to be successful, structures must be put into place that eases the anxiety that students have and more importantly do this proactively. The number one cause for student anxiety is fear of the unknown. (p. 155).

If a student, before the first day of school, knows that when school begins it will be just like last year, then the school year can be started smoother without the anxiety.

As with any campus, student achievement is always the number one goal. Knowing this, we must develop ways to alleviate stress and anxiety which may have a decrease on student achievement. Oliva and Pawlas (2004) remind us that “It is the supervisor’s job to stimulate teachers to want to find new and better ways of accomplishing their instructional duties and improving the curriculum” (p. 338). If a teacher works with, knows the strengths and weaknesses of, and really understands an assigned set of students, the teacher will be better equipped to customize his or her staff development to accommodate those needs. Within the traditional one year classrooms, the teacher has to make an educated guess on what trainings are needed, but if the teacher is able to take the current assessment scores and know that these are the exact areas of concerns and areas for opportunities of improvement, the teacher is able to schedule trainings that help him or her to fill those voids. If a teacher truly has a relationship with his or her students adapting the learning process based on when it is developmentally ready for students becomes much easier. Grossniklaus, Smith, and Wood (2001) explored Piaget’s “four” stages of Cognitive Development as a sequential set of stages through which children progress allowing for them to demonstrate new intellectual abilities and more complex understandings of the world surrounding them. According to the research of Grossniklaus, Smith, and Wood (2001), children never skip a stage. Rather than jumping from stage to stage, children following a continuum from one stage and enter the next stage at varying times, based on the intellectual environment and background of each

individual. Children grow physically, mentally, and emotionally at different ages, yet still move through the process sequentially.

Bhattacharya and Han (2001) took deeper look into Piaget's Assimilation, Accommodation, and Equilibrium Theory concluding that children use what they know from previous experiences to help expand their intellectual growth. They found that, "the link between the internal cognitive structure and external reality depends on a child assimilating the information they already know and accommodating it, or linking it to external reality, or the real world" (p. 7). Piaget calls the balance between the use of prior experiences, or knowledge, and applying this to the real world equilibrium. "When external reality does not match up with the logical internal mental structures, equilibration occurs as an effort to bring balance between assimilation and accommodation as the person adapts more sophisticated internal mental structures" (Bhattacharya & Han, 2001, p. 2). Children use what they already know and have experienced and connect this to the new learning in efforts to make sense of the new learning. The more time that a teacher is able to work through this process with each student, the faster the teacher is able to move a student through Piaget's stages and the better the teacher understands each child's academic needs.

Moye (2008) states, "Effective teachers build positive relationships with students. Respect fosters respect. Barriers are removed once a student realizes that a teacher has the student's best interest in mind" (p. 8). People can not nor will not build relationships with someone unknown, yet so many teachers believe that is what will happen. Trust is developed over time. Throughout our lives we have been trained to never talk to

strangers, so why would we trust one? Teachers must build that relationship with students so the understanding of one another is said.

Sincere conversations need to take place to establish this relationship. In establishing these interpersonal relationships, it is necessary to understand that each and every relationship developed in a lifetime is different. Knowing and understanding this concept, Devito (1995) articulates the four functions of interpersonal relationships:

1. To lesson loneliness – it is important to feel that someone cares, that someone likes us, that someone will protect us, that someone ultimately will love us
2. To secure stimulation – human beings need stimulation; without it, they withdraw
3. To gain in self-knowledge and self-esteem – contact with other human beings, because through them, we learn about ourselves
4. To maximize pleasure and minimize pain – the most general, yet one that could encompass all the others... people need to share good fortune as well as their emotional and physical pain. (p. 293)

In general, when asked, teachers seem to understand building interpersonal relationships and can relate to this concept. The problem becomes that the teacher is unable to understand how to transform an unhealthy interpersonal relationship into a strong and healthy interpersonal relationship. When working with these unhealthy relationships, the teacher needs to know and understand three major theories of relationship deterioration and dissolution in order to identify the problem areas and work to develop a plan to mend the fence.

Devito (1995) explains the theories as:

1. Reinforcement Theory: relationships deteriorate when the relationship is no longer seen as rewarding and may dissolve if the relationship becomes more punishing than rewarding.
2. Social Exchange Theory: your relationship will deteriorate if the costs exceed the rewards.
3. Equity Theory: you stay in relationships in which you receive rewards in proportion to your costs (p. 337)

Dr. Jane Healy (1991), from the Johns Hopkins University Campus of Education, classifies the child's ability to make sense of their surroundings as true "meaningful learning." Healy believes that this meaningful learning will help children be able to face the uncertainties of life and the challenges of the future. Healy's study on brain-based education explores the importance of knowing and understanding a child's brain and knowing when they are 'ready' to learn. Her focus moves away from a required campus curriculum and places the focus on intellectual language, listening skills, and one's ability to reason. "Deficits in these fundamental 'habits of mind' cause not only academic, but also social problems" (Healy, 1991, p. 3). As children are growing and experiencing, children need adult role-models to help shape their brains in order to function, not only academically, but also socially as well. She concludes that, "teachers who know their students well, know their individual 'blueprints' in order to shape their minds to understand academic and social language" (Healy, 1991, p. 11). When students do not have the prior knowledge or coping skills, any type of change can cause anxiety. As the adults, consistency with a teacher and strong relationships allow for children to be able to

take risks and feel comfortable with his or her surroundings during this stage of uncertainty. Gaustad (1998) sees the idea of looping as a consistent way of reducing a student's stress and anxiety for the upcoming school year by increasing stability and then building a sense of community between the teacher and student in addition to the student and classmates.

The Social Benefits through Relationships

Liesveld and Miller (2005) clarify that learning is more authentic when a student is able to make connections rather than through rote memorization. When the connections are not there, it becomes the role of the teacher to help make those connections. If a teacher really knows the student, this process can be obtained at a much faster rate than those teachers that are not familiar with a student. Additionally, in the second year of looping, the teacher can help make connections from the previous year. The special bond that can be created between a teacher and a student through a looping classroom allows for the teacher to really get to know and understand the students. Children tend to be stress-free around people they already know. Chaika (2005) and Burke (1997) identify that children in a looped classroom already have the support systems in place for those who may need stabilizing influences in their home lives. This creates an increased number of opportunities for shy or socially awkward students to develop self-confidence in their abilities and be free from the stress of a possibly making a mistake and them being laughed at. The classroom relationships are strong and positive, allowing time for academics.

As educators, it is necessary to understand the importance of a student seeing the benefit of healthy relationships; otherwise, the relationship will deteriorate and become

unproductive. “A key component of improving school environments has been improving personalization, that is, tightening connections between students and their learning environments (e.g. teachers, other adults, student peers, curriculum, overall campus climate) (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010, p. 3).

Trejos (2001) writes about Ms. Stewart’s, a teacher, first-hand experience of the bond she feels with her students. She writes, “My batch of shy first graders last year could only spell and read so many words. Now, there is no stopping them from running up to ask me questions. They often volunteer to read out loud to their classmates” (Trejos, 2001, p.1).

In their efforts to bring the Woldorf philosophy to the United States, Mays and Nordwall (2006) along with Bafile (2004) compare a looped classroom to a home away from home. The sincere closeness that this creates allows for all to learn so much about themselves, the teacher, and one another. It creates a sincere culture of caring. By using this method, it allows for the teacher to act as a parent and be able to actually teach everyone how to work together. This is able to be done through the academic lessons rather than through a special character education lesson, or group work lessons.

Forsten et al. (1997) continued on to state that discipline is much better within a looped classroom. “The children know the classroom routines and trust that they are in a consistent, stable environment... these students are able to create a special bond with their peers and tend to protect and help one another” (Forsten, Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1997, p. 14). Forsten et al. (1997) also focused on the fact that attendance rises in a looped classroom. They concluded that students actually are excited about coming to school because of the strong bonds that have been created.

Burke (1997) points out that there is an increased level of support for these students because they view the school as a ‘safety net.’ This allows for the students within a looped classroom to feel a stronger sense of community and sense of belonging opposed to students within a non-looping structure.

Olivia and Pawlas (2004) express how one of the biggest obstacles for a campus to overcome is the notion of the teacher having all of the power. The authors state:

“A complete change of thought will be required before the majority of teachers will be willing to admit that teachers themselves can be causes of student behavior problems. Teachers who have an open, introspective personality may look within and recognize that they can be a source of student problems, and these teachers can expect positive changes to occur more readily. However, such introspection flies in the face of tradition, for it has been the custom since campuses were first established to place the blame for misbehavior on the offender” (p. 173).

Beaty-O’Ferral, Green, & Hanna (2010) describe the importance of building empathy and claim it is probably the most important aspect of a positive helping relationship on the part of the helper. Additionally, “many teachers simply assume they understand the student’s problems and dilemmas, and mistakenly try to communicate their understanding in ways that only distance the student” (p. 6)

Along with ‘building empathy,’ Beaty-O’Ferral, Green, & Hanna (2010) highlight two other strategies for building relationships. The second strategy is ‘admiring negative attitudes and behaviors.’ This is paraphrased to mean that the students have worked so hard on this skill for so long that they are good at it. We perceive this as a negative

attribute, and we only work to try and stop the behavior. However, the authors believe that the teachers need to turn this negative behavior into positive behavior. They believe, “Disruptive behaviors, when displayed by a student who takes charge in his or her own way, can sometimes be reframed as great leadership skills” (p.7). It is in the teachers best interest to meet the student where he/she is and retool it from there rather than breaking down the negatives and starting over.

The third strategy that Beaty-O’Ferral, Green, & Hanna (2010) highlight is ‘leaving the ego at the door.’ The authors remind us to ‘leave the ego at the door’ in efforts to remind us to simply be the adult. In efforts to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, the authors point out that “when a teacher takes the comments and manipulations of students personally, interpersonal chaos is likely to follow. Thus, it is a good idea for a teacher to learn to suspend his/her own issues as they arise – to ‘place them on the shelf,’ so to speak, to be addressed later. In efforts to develop a relationship, all parties involved must believe that there is a sense of give and take. If the teacher is working towards a relationship, it can not all be on the teacher’s terms.

For teachers to learn these great teaching techniques there must be an extensive staff development plan in place that not only provides the much needed background information and rationale or philosophy of implementation, but also an implementation strategy. Payne (2008) provides with eight strategies to boost student achievement with under-resourced learners. The second strategy, which is clarified as the most important strategy, is “Build Relationships of Mutual Respect with Students” (p. 19). When wanting to develop a relationship with another person, there is a certain level of learning that must take place. Payne starts off by outlining exactly what is the concept of

relational learning in efforts to demonstrate that once relational learning is understood, a conscious effort can be placed on meeting all of the learner's needs. She explains that relational learning has seven characteristics. By focusing on each of the seven characteristics, the teacher will be better equipped to create an environment that is safe and nurturing for the student to be able to feel comfortable with communicating and willing to learn. Payne lists these characteristics as:

1. Relationships of mutual respect with teachers and administrators;
2. A peer group to belong to that is positive and not destructive;
3. A coach or advocate who helps the student;
4. If not a member of the dominant culture, the student has access to individuals (or histories of individuals) who have attained success and retained connections to their roots;
5. Bridging social capital (email buddies, mentors, et al.) to the larger society.
Social capital is terminology used by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*. It basically means who you know. He identifies two kinds – bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital involves people who are like you; Bridging social capital involves people different from you;
6. At the secondary level, a very specific and clear plan for addressing his/her own learning performance;
7. A safe environment (emotionally, verbally, and physically) (p. 21).

Knowing this concept of what exactly is meant by relational learning, or how we learn about relationships, Payne (2008) highlights a story of one middle school teacher that said,

“Building relationships with the students is probably the most important piece for me of the whole Ruby Payne model. The students who are typically at our campus may not have any other positive relationships in their lives, and they may not trust anyone else. That’s not necessarily true of everyone, but many times students who are low-performing have not trusted a teacher and therefore they wouldn’t perform. Maybe they had it up there all along, but they didn’t want to fire that part up” (p. 19).

It is understood that mutual respect cannot be demanded. However, our biggest struggles in campus s are when the student does not want to comply with doing his/her part in being mutually respectful. We also understand that it must not only be earned, but it must also be taught. For example, if a student has grown up in an environment where everyone is yelling because that is the only way that anyone can be heard, the direct correlation would be to yell at the teacher to ensure that the teacher will hear you. We need to teach these students that we will not speak with him/her until he/she has lowered his/her voice.

Research suggests that “all learning is double-coded – emotionally and cognitively. Relationships constitute the primary motivation for almost all learning” (Payne, 2008, p. 22), yet we do nothing to enhance this. Where are the lesson plans in the classrooms where the relationship teaching is taking place? Do the students understand and really know how to communicate effectively? If we have not taught this skill, we cannot expect the skill. We would not give a mathematics benchmark assessment on regrouping when we haven’t taught regrouping. Unfortunately, when life

is the ongoing assessment, we have to make sure that the relational skills are being taught so when the student is placed in that situation, or assessed, the student can be successful.

The need for relationships is such a major concept that any rigor, relevance, and relationship conference one attends, it is highlighted that one cannot achieve rigor or relevance without relationships. One of the most utilized staff development book study books in campus s today is *Classroom Instruction that Works* by Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock (2001), because it provides research-based strategies for increasing student achievement. The strategies are proven very successful if there are relationships already in place. The need for relationships is so great, that the authors were compelled to preface the book with a section on ‘what we have not included.’ The authors clarify to the reader that:

“We need to make one final comment on the limitations of the conclusions that educators can draw from reading this book. Although the title of the book speaks to instruction in a general sense, you should know that we have limited our focus to instructional strategies. There are certainly other aspects of classroom pedagogy that affect student achievement. In fact, we might postulate that effective pedagogy involves three related areas:

1. Instructional strategies used by the teacher,
2. Management techniques used by the teacher
3. The curriculum designed by the teacher” (p. 9).

It does not matter how amazing the lesson is that is conducted by the teacher, if no one is paying attention, no one is learning. The need is there to get students to want to pay attention.

The Looping Concept

Today, schools are still managed as if every student had a traditional family structure. Every day one more social issue becomes the responsibility of the school. For many students, the only thing consistent in their lives is the school with its procedures. “Given today’s less than traditional family structure, a multiyear model is a way to provide stability in the often unstable lives of children” (Lincoln, 1997, p.50).

Research has indicated that intimacy, persistence, and stability are fundamental factors of looping groups and therefore able to provide that to the students reflecting that both the student and the campus benefit and can lead to true campus reform (Rasmussen, 1998). The concept of a teacher moving from one grade level to the next grade level with his/her students (looping) is a foreign concept to the middle grades. Extensive research has been done with looping in primary grades, and there is even some campus s that requires it with their teachers. In addition to looping being so popular in elementary campus, so is the notion of a heightened awareness of early adolescence. The ‘middle school’ concept was designed to help students transition from elementary to high school, but creating a controlled environment is not enough to bridge that gap.

George (2009) in *Renewing the Middle School: The Early Success of Middle School Education* highlights the long-known issues surrounding the middle grades. George continues to highlight the best practices that have been utilized and even states, “The interdisciplinary team organization probably stands as the movement’s most significant contribution to educational organization” (p. 5). He further clarifies that it is more than simply calling a group of teachers and students a ‘team;’ it must be more. He found that “teaming was really more of a method of organizing teachers and learners than

it was a curriculum plan or an instructional strategy” (p.6). The findings concluded what elementary teachers have been doing for a long time with their thematic units. He found that when middle school teachers integrate the other core content subjects into their lessons, plan together, and help to drive the lesson plans of others, proved to be the most successful.

In addition to the interdepartmental teaming and planning, George (2009) also highlights additional organizational successes that have proved to be very successful in the middle grades. A flexible block schedule, not to be confused with the block schedule of high campus s, where teams shared a common planning time and had the flexibility to move the transition times to accommodate the day’s objectives allowed for the teams to really be able to integrate each other’s content throughout the day. Multiage grouping of students, a campus -within-a-campus, and looping also proved to be very successful. (p. 7)

George (2009) reiterates to us that, “having discovered that the better they knew their students, the better educational outcomes were... in looping, teachers and students from the same grade level would move together from six through eighth grades; eighth graders would move on to high school, and the teachers ‘looped’ back to the sixth grade to begin the process anew” (p. 7).

Kenny (2007) conducted her research on looping within an elementary setting. However, the situation may be different from elementary to middle school, but the problem of building relationships remain the same.

Kenny concludes by listing the overwhelming number of benefits from looping:

1. No waste of the 'getting-to-know-you' month
2. Greater sense of community and sense of belonging
3. Teacher knew each student's individual learning style
4. Students had a clear understanding of what is expected
5. Teacher knows best way to challenge each student
6. Constant safe environment allows for greater risk taking
7. Students seemed to have a greater self-confidence and love of campus (p. 22)

Kenny (2009) also concludes that "some of the gaps or limitations in the research come from the fact that looped classrooms are not a typical option... looping is uncommon enough in the United States to be considered innovative" (p.22).

Knowing that the gaps and limitations are there in the research still do not compare to the successes. There have been no studies to illustrate any negative impact for looping once or even twice with the same group of teachers and students. Kenny (2009) points out that "constant change leads to anxiety and stress on these individuals as they venture out and explore their surroundings. Consistency with the teacher and strong relationships allows for the child to take risks and feel comfortable" (p. 12).

Framework of Looping

Throughout the world, one can find various forms of looping. Checkley (1995) found that looping programs have been a part of education for a long time now. Looping can be traced back to the early 1900s in Germany (Grant et al., 1996). The length of the loops range from two up to nine years in length and research studies will be provided in the United States, Germany, Denmark, Japan, and China. According to Zahorik and

Dichanz (1994) looping is a commonly found structure throughout all of Germany. The history of looping can be traced back to Stuttgart, Germany. It all began when Rudolf Steiner founded the Waldorf campus s in 1919 (Wessling, 2005). Steiner believed that all children progress through three stages of developmental. He set up the campus to allow for each child to have the same teacher to move them through these stages focusing on the body, mind, and soul. Keeney (2007) writes, “With this in mind, Steiner created a campus in which students and teachers formed a deep connection or relationship” (p.8). Another version of looping can be found in Cologne, Germany. Oxley (1994) writes of the Köln-Holweide School. The model that this campus takes is a little different than most. The Köln-Holweide School doesn’t start looping until Grade Five. Once the looping begins, the students will then have the teacher stay with the students until the tenth grade. Understanding the need for students in the upper grades (what we call secondary) benefiting from looping, Morrill (2003) highlighting that Danish campus s frequently have a teacher start in first grade and then remain with the class through ninth grade.

The Japanese educational system embraces the philosophy of looping as well. In Japanese high campus s, the teachers remain with a class throughout all four years of high school (Nichols, 2001). “In the Japanese educational philosophy, the relationship between student and teacher often has a greater value for placement decisions than the specialization of the teacher in one grade or topic” (Nichols, 2001, p. 18). In this instance, each departmental teacher moves with his or her students throughout the higher levels of coursework. For example, the Algebra I teacher would next year teach Geometry, then Algebra II, and then on to Trigonometry.

The Chinese educational system utilizes looping as well. Liu (1997) explains that in China, students are grouped together for chunks of time, and then regrouped for another chunk of time. The first grouping is first through sixth grades, regrouped seven through ninth grade, and then regrouped again for tenth through twelfth grades. In China, the groupings are based on the scores of an assessment to keep homogeneous groups.

Studies Directly Related

Studies with Favorable Effects

Numerous qualitative and quantitative research have been conducted to determine if there is statistical significance proving that looping has a positive impact on academic achievement. Qualitative studies have determined that looping does positively impact student achievement based on the perceptions of teachers, students, parents, and administrators (Blair, 2008).

According to Krogmann and Van Sant (2000), “Of the 3,200 minutes spent in the classroom during the first two weeks of school, an average of 390 minutes were spent on developing rules, routines, and relationships” (p. 13). In the era when time is critical, this poses a serious issue. In stark contrast, within a looped classroom, policies, procedures, and relationships are already formed. With a quick few mini-lessons, previously set norms can be tweaked and fine-tuned and allow for the teacher to move the class towards academic learning objectives versus behavioral objectives.

Krogmann and Van Sant (2000) also highlighted that the teachers themselves believe that it takes up to three months before the teachers can confidently answer questions on the individual student’s learning abilities and styles. Within a looped classroom, the teachers already have an understanding of each of their looped students learning characteristics

and needs right from the start of the new school year. Within this same study, Krogman and Van Sant (2000) continue to point out that test scores can also be evidence of academic growth and progress. This study was done in which there was a comparison between the looped and non-looped classrooms using their version of the Curriculum Based Monitoring (CBM) reading fluency tests. In the looped class, the median reading score was fifty, whereas the median reading score for the non-looped class was forty-seven. In efforts to show the continued growth, the research looked at the results of the second year of looping. At the end of the second year, the looped class' median reading score was sixty-seven and the non-looped class' median reading score was sixty-four and a half.

Kenny's research (2007) was conducted at a suburban San Francisco Bay elementary campus. Showing both academic and social benefits, the campus utilized an online questionnaire with their current third grade students and their teachers in reference to their personal feelings and perceptions on different aspects of looping. She was able to conclude that students felt willing to take risks within the classroom and that they had a strong sense of relationship with their fellow peers. The students felt that they had a bond with the other students and with the teacher and this gave them less stress and anxiety throughout the day and school year. The teachers connected the looping of their students with them to their campus's improvement claiming that this saved time in planning, because the teachers felt they already knew the students. Another benefit that arose was that they felt that the students seemed more motivated to come to campus.

In a two year looping classroom, Kerr (2002) conducted a research study using interviews and surveys with students, parents, and the teachers. Findings in this study

showed that stronger relationships had occurred and that looping had a great impact on student's transitions, self-esteem, and test scores. The parents that participated through their children looping expressed more interests in campus involvement. The teachers that participated by looping with their students found that planning curriculum and instruction for their classes and instruction became more productive. The study concluded that strong relationships developed and did create a learning environment that met students' needs.

Barto's (1999) research was conducted within two Midwestern cities studying sixth and seventh graders. Barto compared the 1999 standardized test cores in Science and Communication Arts of students that were looped with their teacher to students that were not looped with their teacher. The research concluded that looping students had higher scores in both categories.

Hampton, Mumford, and Bond's (1998) Project F.A.S.T. (Families Are Students and Teachers) studied for four years an environment that included students, parents, and teachers. The campus's mission was to create an extended family like atmosphere in comparison to students that were in the traditional one-year programs. The researchers found that academic achievement was greater in the looping classrooms than it was in the traditional, one-year long settings.

Gregory (2009) completed a quantitative study that included 240 middle school students. Results indicated a significant relationship between student achievement in reading, mathematics, and writing achievement on standardized tests and looping. Kelley (2004) conducted a study from 2002 to 2003 to quantify if looping had a significant impact on student's reading achievement scores. Kelly followed a group of sixteen

students that were looped and sixteen students that were not looped. They were tested using the online STAR computer reading assessment program. The assessment was given at the end of the first grade and then again at the end of the second grade. The students that were not in a looping situation demonstrated a score gain of eight months. The students that were within the looping situation demonstrated a score gain of one year and two and a half months. The difference was four and a half months between the looping and non-looping groups.

Burke (2000) wrote a qualitative study about a group of teachers who were currently utilizing looping. This research showed that student academic achievement was improved by looping. The highlight was the long term teacher/student relationships. It was also reported that: seventy percent of the teachers reported using more positive approaches to classroom management, ninety-two percent stated how they knew their students better, sixty-nine percent of the students were more willing to participate in class, eighty-five percent described that their students felt to be an important member of the group and feeling a sense of pride, and eighty-four percent acknowledged that they have more positive relationships with parents.

Studies with Unfavorable Effects or Concerns

While conducting research, not all research studies showed a significant academic gain for students. Knowing that each specific situation is different and unique in its own right, the ultimate goal remains the same: student success. As we all research to find the ultimate answer to educational reform and/or student success, one consideration to be made by and for or all of the stakeholders including, but not limiting, the campus board, superintendent, principals, and even teachers is the question of whether or not to utilize a

looping model. In effort to assess the complete situation and weigh all options, it is important to understand the arguments against and the concerns that are presented.

Personality clashes sit atop the list of major concerns of critics of looping.

“Incompatibility between a teacher and a student, a teacher and a parent or among the students in class is a possibility” (Grant, Richardson, & Forsten, 2000, p. 25). In contrast, a few researchers also confirmed that incompatibility with the teacher to student, teacher to parent, or student to student relationships can occur in non-looping classrooms as well (Burke, 1997). Lincoln (1997) provides one potential solution would be to change the classroom placement of any particular student that has a conflict so severe that it might “impede their learning, as would be the case in a non-looping classroom” (p. 51).

Gillman (2005) concludes that in order for an administrator to address the challenges that should arise through looping within a middle school program, the teacher teams must have time for planning and collaboration in reference to instructional strategies, student issues, and philosophical alignment. In this case study, the challenge was identifying dedicated time for such collaboration and became an obstacle to successful implementation.

Vecchione (2004) conducted a limited, interview-based, multi-site case study of elementary campus principals in seven campus s within a school district. Vecchione identified obstacles that affect the implementation of looping teaching assignments. Among these obstacles were; equitable creation of class rosters, need for heterogeneous classes, balance in the high and low academic levels, girls versus boys, and special populations such as Limited English Proficient (LEP) or Gifted and Talented (GT)

students. Due to parent demands, student mobility rate, or through teacher attrition, some change in the group dynamics will occur and generally, will be unavoidable.

Denault (1999) reminds us that, “a marginal teacher, a teacher with minimal instructional skills in a looping classroom is another concern addressed in the research” (p. 24). “The stakes are much too high for a child to spend two or three years with a teacher who is not highly motivated to learn additional curricula or lacks knowledge of the student learner needs” (Grant, et al., 2000, p. 25). They continue on to explain that: “The looping model requires a teacher with commitment and energy, as well as, one willing to learn and plan instruction around several grade levels of curriculum. The looping structure requires much more work than applying the curriculum related to one grade and repeating that curriculum each year in a traditional classroom structure” (p. 26)

A new student, moved from another classroom or a newly enrolled student, entering the classroom in the middle of the cycle is an additional concern of this structure (Lincoln, 1997). As with any procedure within the campus’s structure, “certain steps need to be in place when a new student enters in an established looping classroom to ensure acceptance and, ultimately, successful transition” (Grant, et al., 2000, p. 29). Finally, the last major concern with looping is two-fold. The issues that arise are the students’ perceptions, as well as the teacher’s perception of the concept of ‘bidding farewell.’ Burke (1997) concludes with this one major concern is the student’s ability to say goodbye to their current teacher after building such a strong relationship. It is possible for a child to develop separation anxiety and have an extremely difficult time emotionally of letting go. As a counterpoint, Grant and Richardson (1996) state, what

most successful administrators and teachers would agree, that “any principal would appreciate that kind of connection with all students and teachers” (p. 18).

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Rationale for Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of looping in an intermediate campus (grades five and six) in the area of academic success. Looping, in this case, is described as when an assigned set of fifth grade students who have the same classroom teachers in grade five and then again in grade six. The goal of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between a looping and a non-looping classrooms and academic achievement in (a) reading and in (b) mathematics.

The beginning of the school year is a time of uncertainty and, because of this, a time filled with stress and anxiety. At the start of each school year, the teacher has to understand each individual student as a person, as well as, where they are academically, and each student's individual learning modality in order to successfully meet the students' educational needs. There is a clear and constant concern about the lack of time regarding the requirements within campus s and classrooms that can either promote or hinder the teacher's ability to maximize learning (ASCD, 2009).

We know that for learning to be maximized students must take risks. "For students to be able to take the risks required of them to be sources of learning, they need classrooms that feel safe" (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2005, p. 330). For this to happen in a 176 day school year, relationships between students and teachers must be built and must be built quickly.

Students know the shame of not belonging. Educators are forced to become advocates for social justice by peeling back the proverbial onion and getting down to the root causes that are hindering students' learning. Marshall and Oliva (2010) argues, "The challenges of demographics and of inequities are chronic and remain unresolved by the piled-on years of traditional practice, scholarship, theory, and professional training in educational administration" (p. 11). The authors continue to argue that, "we must move outside the school building and the ordinary central office routines. We must prevail despite attempts by opposing forces to shelter reassuring viewpoints and protect entrenched privileges" (p. 326). For schools to have an impact, all bridges should be constructed and protected from being burned down.

Current research focuses primarily on looping within an elementary school setting (Barto, 1999). This study provides research on the looping practice as it was used within the intermediate grades in efforts to further enhance the need for building strong relationships with students beyond elementary campuses.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

Research Question One:

Do statistical differences exist in reading comprehension achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping and those who did not?

Research Question Two:

Do statistical differences exist in mathematics achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping and those who did not?

Research Design

This study outlines a causal-comparative quantitative study of the impact of looping practices on academic achievement scores at two northern Houston inner city intermediate schools. The objective of this research was to measure if looping, having a set of students advance with the same teacher to the next grade-level, did impact achievement scores. The result of the research provides evidence of the effect of looping at this campus.

This study used a causal-comparative research approach to determine the consequences or relationships that may have a cause-and-effect on student academic achievement scores (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The research design provided evidence on the effect of looping on achievement scores by comparing 88 looping students from School A, with 88 comparable non-looping students from School B. All of the students in School A that attended grades five and six that had the same reading and mathematics teacher for both years, took the AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measures (CBM), or General Outcome Measures, and that comprised the sample. Students in School B were within a traditional one-year model: progressing year to year and grade to grade with new teachers each year. These students attended a similar campus within the same school district and served as the control group. 88 students were randomly selected from the 341 students in 6th grade to have a same sampling size as School A and then

those 88 were required to take the AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure, or General Outcome Measure.

The research hypothesis was that looping will have a positive impact on achievement scores. The rationale was that looping created an environment that provided more time for the teacher to teach, rather than discussing policies and procedures at the beginning of the year and taking time to have to get to know and build relationships with each student, take time with discipline issues, and take time in getting students to build relationships with other classmates. In addition to saving time, looping created an environment where students felt safe enough to accept and take risks. This environment resulted in an increased sense of support, and ultimately, higher academic achievement scores would be the result of this increased sense of support.

This hypothesis was based on the consistency of the school environment in both School A and in School B. The only exception is the looping in School A, and the non-looping in School B. During the two years of the study, consistency included: no new programs were added, the campus administration, the campus demographics, the student's socio-economic status, and academic achievement levels. The demographics, socio-economic status, and academic achievement have all been verified by the local school district and the Texas Education Agency (TEA)] The AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure, or General Outcome Measure, was used for numerous years throughout the school district, and students and teachers were both familiar with the process of universal screening done three times a year. In both schools, the students were accustomed to their campus' expectations and routines including testing and comparing student data to determine progress in reading and in mathematics.

The AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure or General Outcome Measure is routinely used in conjunction with a school's Response to Intervention (RTI) model. According to Pearson Education,

Within AIMSweb there are several assessments available to monitor students' progress within the area of mathematics. Mathematics Computation (M-COMP) assesses basic computation skills, while Mathematics Concepts & Applications (M-CAP) assesses the application of several concepts within the area of mathematics. Both of these assessments are designed for universal screening (also referred to as benchmarking) as well as more frequent progress monitoring. AIMSweb also provides single skill computation probes (called Math Facts) such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division that are designed to complement M-COMP for frequent progress monitoring. (p. 1)

For reading, the Lexile Framework accurately matches readers with books and instructional resources by measuring both reading ability and text complexity on the same developmental scale. Unlike other systems, the Lexile Framework evaluates reading ability based on actual assessments, rather than generalized age or grade levels.

In this study, the dependent variables were the reading and mathematics scores. The independent variables were whether or not a student looped. It was hypothesized that the reading and mathematics were dependent on the independent variables of looping and non-looping. Reading and mathematics scores were compared to determine statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level of significance to determine if looping did in fact have an impact on achievement scores.

Sample Description

The students used in this study were in attendance at one of the two intermediate campuses in the same northern Houston school district during the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school years. The school district where these schools are located encompasses 111 square miles and welcomes approximately 63,900 students each year and is the 11th largest school district in the state. The student demographics of the district are 69.75% Hispanic, 25.73 African American, 2.17% Caucasian, 1.39% Asian or Pacific Islander, and .11% Native American. The structure of campuses are pre-k centers, elementary schools housing kindergarten through fourth grade, intermediate schools housing grades five and six, middle schools house grades seven and eight, ninth grade centers, and high schools housing grades ten, eleven, and twelve.

School A was located in the northern Houston school district and used the looping pedagogical model. The enrollment for this campus was approximately 770 students in grades five and six. The demographics for the campus were: 46% African-American, 53% Hispanic, .05% White, and .02% Asian. The poverty index as indicated by the economically disadvantaged number of free and/or reduced lunches was 77%. Students who qualified and received special education services were 12% of the campus population and the students who were identified Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and received English as a Second Language (ESL) or Bilingual Educational support were 11% of the student population. The mobility rate of this campus was 20%. School A received a 'Recognized' rating by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) by maintaining at least 80% of students in all subgroups met the standard in reading and mathematics on the state assessment.

School B was also located in the northern Houston school district, but did not use the looping pedagogical model. The enrollment for this campus was approximately 770 students in grades five and six. The demographics for the campus were: 56% African-American, 40% Hispanic, 2.3% White, and 1.8% Asian. The poverty index as indicated by the economically disadvantaged number of free and/or reduced lunches was 75.8%. Students who qualified and received special education services were 6% of the student population, and the students who were identified Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and receive English as a Second Language (ESL) or Bilingual Educational support was also 11% of the student population. The mobility rate of this campus was 7%. School B received a 'Recognized' rating by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) by maintaining at least 80% of the students in all subgroups met the standard in reading and mathematics on the state assessment.

The campus demographics for School A and School B were comparable (See Table 1).

Table 1

Student Demographics by Campus s for 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 Campus Years

Demographics	<u>Campus A</u>		<u>Campus B</u>	
	2011	2012	2011	2012
Enrollment:	768	778	771	773
African American:	46%	44%	56%	56%
Hispanic:	53%	47%	40%	40%
White:	.05%	.05%	2%	2%
Asian:	.02%	.02%	2%	2%
Economically Disadvantaged:	77%	77%	75%	75%
Special Education:	12%	14%	6%	5%
Limited English Proficiency:	11%	12%	11%	10%
Mobility Rate:	20%	32%	7%	6%
Accountability Rating:	Recognized	Recognized	Recognized	Recognized

School A had a slightly higher percentage of Hispanic students and Special Education students. A more significant difference was the mobility rate, or the movement of new students into the campus or the withdrawal from the campus. The mobility rate of School A was 27% versus School B being only 7%.

Students attending School A looped from fifth grade to sixth grade with their teachers, while the students attending School B did not loop with their teachers instead having a different set of teachers when moving from fifth grade to sixth grade. The

students in this study have completed the AIMSweb Universal Screener Benchmark for the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school years.

Sample Information

Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) determined the minimum number of subjects needed for a sampling size. Their recommendations are 100 participants for a descriptive study, 50 participants for a correlational study, and 30 participants for a causal-comparative study. For this study, cluster sampling was used. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) describe the need for this approach because, “Cluster Sampling is a sampling technique used when "natural" groupings are evident in a statistical population” (p.253). A list of looping students in sixth grade from School A consisted of students who were completing two years with the same teacher during the 2010-2011, 5th grade and the 2011-2012, 6th grade school years in both reading and in mathematics. If a student was not part of the complete looping cycle, that student was not included as a participant. A similar list of non-looping students was developed for School B with students who had been in traditional classrooms for the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school year. From the looping and non-looping lists, the sample size was 176 subjects with 88 subjects coming from School A and 88 subjects coming from School B that were randomly selected for the sampling groups (Meltzoff, 1998) and listed by student identification number order.

School A is centered around each team of three core academic teachers assigned approximately 125 students. The core academic teachers are divided by academic subjects including one mathematics teacher, one language arts teacher, and one teacher that teaches science and social studies. Each learning team is comprised of at least one fifth grade homeroom and two sixth grade homeroom, or two fifth grade homerooms and one

sixth grade homeroom. At the end of the academic year, each core teachers' assigned set of fifth grade students will then become their assigned set sixth grade students the following year. The academic teams will not change. In School A, teachers are required to teach both fifth and sixth grade curriculum throughout the day, where School B is only assigned one grade-level curriculum and then the following year will teach the same curriculum to a new set of students.

Instrumentation

For this study, the AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measures (CBM), or General Outcome Measures, for both reading and mathematics assessment results were collected from the beginning of the year in fifth grade and the middle of the year sixth grade. AIMSweb Universal Screeners are given three times a year. One is administered at the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and at the end of the year. The beginning of the year in fifth grade will be used as the benchmark, and the middle of the year in sixth grade will be used as the comparison. Pearson's AIMSweb is a research-based, norm-referenced set of tests that measure the basic skills of both mathematics and reading. In its entirety, AIMSweb is used as a benchmarking and progress monitoring system based on direct, frequent and continuous student assessments that create a baseline for the Response-to-Interventions (RTI) process. The objective of this measure was to utilize the benchmarking process to measure academic growth over a period of time. Studies concerning this practice are described in detail in Standard Reading Assessment Passages (RAPs) for Use in General Outcome Measurement: A Manual Describing Development and Technical Features (Howe & Shinn, 2002). Established assessments such as these are advantageous to use because they have published validity

and reliability data (Meltzoff, 1998). The primary purpose of this assessment was to provide a baseline measure of basic skills in both reading and in mathematics.

The AIMSweb benchmark universal screeners were a source of the normal curve equivalent scores (NCEs). The NCE score were used to calculate the gain of academic basic skills from one year (2010-2011) to the following year (2011-2012). NCE scores were used to make the comparison for a statistically significant difference exemplified by a t-test and linear regression.

AIMSweb benchmark universal screeners consisted of one of each of the following: reading maze (to measure the on-level reading comprehension), and secondary numeracy (to measure mathematics computation).

Instrumentation Reliability

The degree of reliability of the AIMSweb CBM was based on test score consistency, dependability, and repeatability (Shin, 2005). AIMSweb Curriculum Based measures have over thirty years of research and have been found to be reliable (Shin, 2005).

Test-Retest Reliability

The reliability of a test refers to the consistency of scores from different administrations at about the same time. Administrations were conducted simultaneously to ensure that true ability was the same across administrations; differences in scores can then be attributed to measurement error and not reflect true growth (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Instrument Validity

The degree of validity is based on test appropriateness and meaningfulness (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). It was assumed that this exam will measure what it was supposed to measure. The validity of the AIMSweb CBM has been proven to be valid (Shin, 2005)

Content-Related Validity

Content-related validity of the CBM is the extent that the knowledge and skills needed are being measured (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The AIMSweb CBM measure the knowledge and skills that were needed for each grade-level (Shin, 2005).

Construct-Related Validity

Construct-related validity allows one to have the evidence needed to make inferences (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The AIMSweb CBMs are standardized tests, and standardized tests have a history of being reliable and contain content validity; therefore, inferences made from one year to the next would be consistent (Shin, 2005). Numerous studies and researchers have utilized standardized assessments in causal-comparative statistical analyses to determine academic achievement of looping versus non-looping groups of students (Blair, 2008; Bogart, 2002; Barto, 1999; Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000; Shneyderman, 2000; Yang, 1997)

Procedures and Time Frame

AIMSweb benchmark universal screeners were given in the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and at the end of the year to be consistent. This study utilized the 2010-2011 school years's beginning of the year data as the baseline, and then utilized the 2011-2012 middle of the year benchmark data as the comparison so all data used was

collected during the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school years. The pre-test scores were the scores for the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, and the post-test scores were from the middle-of-the-year scores of the 2011-2012 school year.

Written approval to conduct this study was obtained from the principals of School A and of School B along with written approval from the local school district. In addition, written approval was made through the University of Houston for this study. Once approval was granted, the student data became available for review. A roster of students was created, and each student was coded to eliminate identification of individual students within the assigned student population. By utilizing student coding, official identities were protected (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Data Analysis

Data was collected regarding whether a student had looped or had not looped and the student's individual reading and mathematics scores. Software was utilized in efforts to determine if there was a significant statistical gain between the scores (dependent variable) and looping (independent variable.) Once this was done, conclusions were made on whether to accept or reject the hypothesis. In efforts to show a significant gain in scores from fifth grade to sixth grade, the gain score was used in both reading and in mathematics.

A t-test or a statistical hypothesis test was used to determine and compare gain scores. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) describe the t-test as,

A *t*-test is any statistical hypothesis test in which the test statistic follows a Student's *t* distribution if the hypothesis is supported. It is most commonly applied when the test statistic would follow a normal distribution if the value of a scaling

term in the test statistic were known. When the scaling term is unknown and is replaced by an estimate based on the data, the test statistic (under certain conditions) follows a Student's t distribution (412).

Gay (1996) warns that using student gain scores can pose problems because not all students have the same gain room. Gay also suggests that with this type of study, it is important to, “simply compare the average gain of the experimental group with the average gain of the control group” (p. 366).

The percent of student improvement from the pre and post tests of the AIMSweb benchmark universal screeners was also examined to determine the exact gain between Schools A, School B, and their individual subgroups.

Limitations/Threats to the Study

Wiersma and Jurs (2009) stated that the following are threats to experimental validity:

History threat: a history threat to experimental validity is “an unanticipated event that occurs while the experiment is in progress that affects the dependent variable” (p. 141). This threat was low for this study because the students that were selected as part of the study have been attending school for both of the consecutive school years and was familiar with the process.

Maturation threat: a maturation threat is the “processes operating within the subject as a function of time” (p. 141). To prevent the maturation threat, if a student drops out of the looping classroom, the student was not included as a study participant. If an individual student changed his/her special programs placement, the student was not included in the study. The increase in English in Limited English Proficient (LEP)

students could affect the English Language Learners' test scores; therefore, this group may have a higher maturation threat.

Testing threat: a testing threat is “the effect of taking one test on the scores of subsequent tests” (p. 141). This threat was low because the testing environment was not changed, and the test had been measured for reliability and validity.

Instrumentation threat: an instrumentation threat is “an effect due to inconsistent use of the measuring instrument” (p.141). This threat was low because the directions were standardized and both looping and non-looping students took the appropriate level of assessment for the specific grade. The instrumentation threat of the AIMSweb Universal Screener was considered to be low because of the history of validity and reliability of the assessments.

Statistical regression: this threat is “an effect caused by a tendency for subjects selected on the basis of extreme scores to regress toward an average performance on a subsequent test” (p. 141). The possibility of a statistical regression threat was present because within the groups at each campus there were will be students who qualified for special education services and are English Language Learners (ELLs). If their scores did increase, was it because of the looping or because of special education or the ELLs intervention and modifications?

Selection threat: this is “an effect due to the groups of subjects not being randomly assigned to groups; a selection factor is operating such that groups are not equivalent” (p.141). The selection of students for this study was done in a manner that would avoid bias and was random.

From the looping and non-looping lists, the sample size was 176 subjects with 88 subjects coming from School A and 88 subjects coming from School B. School A had only 88 students that looped in both reading and in mathematics. School B had 341 potential students that did not loop with their teacher in both reading and in mathematics. Therefore, 88 students were randomly selected for the sampling groups (Meltzoff, 1998) and listed by student identification number order. According to Gay (1996), “Random sampling is the process of selecting a sample in such a way that all individuals in the defined population have an equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample” (p. 114). The fourth name on the list was picked until there were 88 names chosen from the list. Then, each name was given a code number. Students from School A were numbered A-1 through A-88, and similarly, students from School B were numbered B-1 through B-90. By doing this, the sample group statistically represented the whole group of all students attending either School A or School B.

Mortality threat: Mortality threat is “an effect due to subjects dropping out of the experiment on a nonrandom basis” (p.141). This study did not have a mortality threat because only students who attended a northern Houston intermediate campus for both the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years were included in the sample of students from looping in School A and for the non-looping, traditional model in School B.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

This study attempted to address whether looping in grades five and six significantly affected the learning outcomes on the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measures (MAZE/CBM) in both reading and in mathematics by comparing the results of two Houston area intermediate campuses. This was a causal-comparative study. The gains in reading and the mathematics scores was the dependent variable and the independent variable was the students either looping or non-looping. In addition, descriptive statistics were examined to determine the actual percentage of gain improvement between both schools and among the subgroups.

AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measures (MAZE/CBM) academic achievement scores of a randomly selected group of students from two Houston area intermediate campus s were used to determine if the looping environment in the classrooms would impact achievement scores. AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measures (MAZE/CBM) were given three times throughout the campus year. The first administration was at the beginning of the school year, the second administration was in the middle of the school year after winter break, and the final administration was at the end of the school year. The results for the Reading (MAZE) and the Mathematics (CBM) of 88 looping students from School A and the results of 88 non-looping students from School B were compared. 176 students' scores were used rather than the 100 needed according to Frankel and Wallen (2006).

The researcher received the 2010-2011 AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measures (MAZE/CBM) achievement scores from Pearson Publisher and obtained the current results from each of the respective campus' Testing Coordinator. School A showed 88 students who were enrolled and were able to take the AIMSweb Benchmark universal screener, and School B showed 341 students that were enrolled that were able to take the AIMSweb Curriculum Based universal screener, but of the 341 potential students, only 88 were selected. Of these numbers, a matrix was utilized to shrink the overall numbers to make the groups as pure and similar as possible. The matrix included removing any student who had not been in attendance at the campus for two consecutive years, removing any students that were in a special program (Special Education, English as a Second Language, Bilingual Education, and Gifted and Talented). The pretest, or baseline assessment, was administered in both schools in September of 2010. The post-test was administered in January of 2012.

The score data in reading and math from the pre-test and post-test were collected. A statistical analysis of the gained scores from the two separate groups was completed. The mean, standard deviation, and t-test scores were then calculated. By using a test of significance, this helped to determine whether or not to reject the hypothesis and to infer the difference. If the researcher rejected the hypothesis the mean difference was found to be significant. "Because a mean is probably the most satisfactory measure for characterizing a group, researchers find it important to determine whether the difference between means of samples is significant" (Best & Kahn, p. 389, 1998). The level of significance most commonly used is $p \leq .05$ (Best & Kahn, 1998).

According to Frankel and Wallen (2003), the t-test is “a parametric statistical test used to see whether there is a difference between the means of two samples” (p.241).

The rejection or acceptance of a hypothesis is based on the level of significance which the t-test exhibits (Best & Kahn, 1998).

Student Description

The students who were selected and used for this study attended two Houston area intermediate schools and were in attendance for the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school years. School A in this study used the two-year looping pedagogical instructional model, and School B in this study used the traditional one-year classroom model.

The students used in this study attended one of the two intermediate campuses in the same northern Houston school district during the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school years. The school district where these schools are located encompasses 111 square miles and welcomes approximately 63,900 students each year and is the 11th largest school district in the state. The student demographics of the district are 69.75% Hispanic, 25.73 African American, 2.17% Caucasian, 1.39% Asian or Pacific Islander, and .11% Native American. The structure of campuses are pre-k centers, elementary schools housing kindergarten through fourth grade, intermediate schools housing grades five and six, middle schools house grades seven and eight, ninth grade centers, and high schools housing grades ten, eleven, and twelve.

School A was located in the northern Houston school district and used the looping pedagogical model. The enrollment for this campus was also approximately 770 students in grades five and six. The demographics for the campus were: 46% African-American, 53% Hispanic, .05% White, and .02% Asian. The poverty index as indicated

by the economically disadvantaged number of free and/or reduced lunches was 77%. Students who qualified and received special education services were 12% of the campus population and the students who were identified Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and received English as a Second Language (ESL) or Bilingual Educational support were 11% of the student population. The mobility rate of this campus was 20%. School A received a 'Recognized' rating by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) by maintaining at least 80% of students in all subgroups met the standard in reading and mathematics on the state assessment.

School B was also located in the northern Houston school district, but did not use the looping pedagogical model. The enrollment for this campus was also approximately 770 students in grades five and six. The demographics for the campus were: 56% African-American, 40% Hispanic, 2.3% White, and 1.8% Asian. The poverty index as indicated by the economically disadvantaged number of free and/or reduced lunches was 75.8%. Students who qualified and received special education services were 6% of the student population, and the students who were identified Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and receive English as a Second Language (ESL) or Bilingual Educational support was also 11% of the student population. The mobility rate of this campus was 7%. School B received a 'Recognized' rating by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) by maintaining at least 80% of the students in all subgroups met the standard in reading and mathematics on the state assessment.

The campus demographics for School A and School B were comparable. School A had a slightly higher percentage of Hispanic students and Special Education students. A more significant difference was the mobility rate, or the movement of new students

into the campus or the withdrawal from the campus. The mobility rate of School A was 27% versus School B being only 7%.

Table 2

Student Demographics by Campus s for 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 Campus Years

Demographics	<u>Campus A</u>		<u>Campus B</u>	
	2011	2012	2011	2012
Enrollment:	768	778	771	773
African American:	46%	44%	56%	56%
Hispanic:	53%	47%	40%	40%
White:	.05%	.05%	2%	2%
Asian:	.02%	.02%	2%	2%
Economically Disadvantaged:	77%	77%	75%	75%
Special Education:	12%	14%	6%	5%
Limited English Proficiency:	11%	12%	11%	10%
Mobility Rate:	20%	32%	7%	6%
Accountability Rating:	Recognized	Recognized	Recognized	Recognized

Table 3

Student Demographics Applied to Study

Demographics	School A	School B
African American:	39	49
Hispanic:	41	35
White:	1	2
Asian:	1	2
Limited English Proficiency:	10	9
Economically Disadvantaged:	68	66
Number in the Study:	88	88

Individual student profiles were not available from Pearson Publisher nor from the school district's Research and Evaluation Department. Applying the 2010-2011 campus demographic percentages to the number of students included in the study gives a view of possible number of students from School A and from School B. The purpose of translating into numbers was to compare similarities within the two schools. School B had a higher number of African American students (49 versus 39). School A had a higher number of Hispanic students (41 versus 35). Students who were enrolled within these two campuses as immigrants, for whom the English language was not their first language, tended to trail behind English speaking, white students (Berlak, 2001). The ELL (English Language Learner) or LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students who were receiving services were not included in this study. However, there were students enrolled within both of the campus s whose parents had denied ELL/LEP services, and were therefore coded as a "general education" student but still were identified as an

ELL/LEP student. Both campus s have the same probability chances (9 students) of having a waiver ELL/LEP student being part of this study, but the student is not receiving any bilingual or ESL interventions. If an ELL/LEP student presented a disadvantage on the AIMSweb Curriculum Based screener, then both campuses would have experienced the concern equally.

The Special Education students differ between the two campuses, but any student that had been identified as receiving special education services was not included in this study and therefore would not have influenced the outcome of the study for either campus. Once the criteria were set, all students who qualified for the criteria were used. It was desired to have a sampling of at least 100 students, and this study had a sample size of 176.

Table 4

Gender Comparison of Population in Study

Gender	Campus A	Campus B
Female:	47	45
Male:	41	43
Number in the Study:	88	88

Gender was not one of the dependent variables used in this study. For this study, gender was assumed by name recognition and tallied. The male and female genders were divided as close to the 50% point by each of the two campus groups. For this study, the purpose of calculating gender was to determine if the gender number was skewed in

either direction. Research has shown that girls tend to score higher on written and reading examinations, and boys tend to score higher on mathematics and science assessments (Pope, Wentzel, Braden, & Anderson, 2006). For example, if there were to be more females within the looping classroom group, the results on the reading AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measures (MAZE/CBM) might have been skewed higher or similarly with the mathematics assessment if there were not an even number of male students.

Analysis of Data and Findings

Two research questions were tested utilizing mean score gains, standard deviations, and a t-test.

Research Hypothesis One

Research hypothesis one. Do statistical differences exist in reading comprehension achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping and those who did not?

Descriptive Statistics

The results of the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (Reading MAZE) examination for looping and non-looping students were shown in Table 4.

Table 5

Reading MAZE Raw Score Results of Means (M) Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Test Between Groups

Reading MAZE Score	Looping	Non-Looping
Pre-Test:		
Mean:	32.63	36.84
Standard Deviation:	9.50	15.19
Post-Test:		
Mean:	54.13	45.69
Standard Deviation:	18.56	12.01
Score Difference:		
Mean:	21.50	8.85*
Standard Deviation:	18.27	16.83
*P Value:	0.025	

The t-test results show that there was a statistically significant difference between the reading comprehension gains scores of the looping students and the non-looping students that was less than the needed $p < .05$. Based on this t-test, Research Hypothesis Two was accepted and the hypothesis was rejected based on the p value of .025.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in Table 4, the data from this study found that the looping educational classroom design did have a statistically significant level of affect on the

Reading MAZE gain scores. The study found a $p = .025$ level of significance and the research hypothesis was accepted. With having a level of significance of $p < .05$, a Type I error was considered. However, .025 is far enough from the .05 to conclude that it is more likely for the dependent variable and the independent variables to have a relationship.

The researcher considered the question of a positive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable as outlined by Popham (2000). Do strong, healthy student and teacher relationships have a direct link on student achievement? David Klein believes, "The foundation for the mastery of later standards should be built at each level (2000, p.1)." A student must have the strong foundations of reading comprehension and basic literacy sense in order to move through life understanding and being able to apply reading in efforts to solve our everyday, real world problems. A teacher must get to know each student and his/her strengths and weaknesses in efforts to close the gaps in learning for each student. A looping classroom allows the time and flexibility for the teacher to do this.

The findings in this study are similar to the results found in other studies. Hampton, Mumford, and Bond's (1998) Project F.A.S.T. (Families are Students and Teachers) spent four years studying urban school students and reported gains in student achievement in both reading and in mathematics. Additional studies including the same favorable outcomes include Bogart's (2002) study in Tennessee involving two year looping and 107 students and Shneyderman's (2000) larger study in Miami, Florida that involved 612 students and 26 different elementary campus s.

Research Hypothesis Two

Research hypothesis two. Do statistical differences exist in mathematics achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping and those who did not?

The results of the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (Mathematics CBM) examination for looping and non-looping students are shown in Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 5

Mathematics CBM Raw Score Results of Means (M) Scores, Standard Deviation (SD), and T-Test Between Groups

Mathematics CBM Score	Looping	Non-Looping
Pre-Test:		
Mean:	15.85	12.39
Standard Deviation:	6.93	5.89
Post-Test:		
Mean:	24.62	20.37
Standard Deviation:	7.20	7.80
Score Difference:		
Mean:	8.77	7.98
Standard Deviation:	6.11	7.83
P Value:	0.454	

The t-test results show that there was not a statistically significant difference between the mathematics gains scores of the looping students and the non-looping students, greater than $p > .05$. Based on the t-test research hypothesis one was rejected and the hypothesis was accepted. There was not enough evidence to reject the hypothesis.

Conclusion

As illustrated in Table 5, the data from this study found that the instructional design, looping, did not have a statistical significance in mathematics and the research hypothesis was rejected based on the t-test. With a value of $p = .454$, this is drastically different than the needed $p < .05$ which concludes that there may have been outside variables which influenced the outcomes of the study. Some of these include student prior mathematics experience, basic number sense, teacher trainings, teacher experience, or even pressure of the state testing and grade five being an SSI (Student Success Initiative) grade-level. However, upon further investigation using percent of gain score improvement, students in School A increased

During this two year period, there were potentially other personal and academic benefits for the looping students which this study did not measure. These benefits may include: parental involvement, strengthening of relationships, decline in office referrals for classroom disruptions, extended learning time, an increase in student attendance, less anxiety towards campus, long-term and meaningful relationships with students and parents, individualizing the curriculum for each students' strengths and/or weaknesses, a more stable learning environment, and a long-term plan for each student.

The findings, in the area of mathematics, are similar to other research studies. Shaefer's 2002 study reported that a Dubois Area School District resulted in little difference between the looping and non-looping academic score gains. This was a two year study done involving 48 first and second grade students. This study was also to the effectiveness of looping in reading and mathematics.

Two additional studies agree with Shaefer. Jacobson (1997) also reported that a study done in Naples, Florida, resulted in inconclusive data to prove if looping impacted students' academic gains. In central Pennsylvania, Snoke (2007) found no statistical significance by studying students who attended a looping classroom for two years and compared their scores to students of a traditional one year classroom.

In contrast, studies conducted by Jubert (1996), Yang (1997), Hampton, Mumford and Bond (1998), Rasmussen (1998), Barto (1999), Krogmann and Van Sant (2000), Shneyderman (2000), Bogart (2002), Kelley (2003), and Pecanic (2003) disagree with the results of this research study. These studies showed a significant gain in mathematics scores of students in looping classrooms.

Summary

Given the two research hypotheses, the results and findings from this study have given mixed results. The Research Hypothesis One was accepted because of the results of the t-test calculations. The results of this calculation have concluded that the statistical significance of the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (Reading MAZE) scores of the looping and non-looping students' mean gain scores do indicate with assurance that looping directly affects and raises the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (Reading MAZE) scores.

Research Hypothesis Two was rejected because of the results of the t-test calculations. The results of this calculation have concluded that the statistical significance of the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (Mathematics CBM) scores of the looping and non-looping students' mean gain scores do not indicate with assurance that looping directly affects and raises the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (Mathematics CBM) scores. The looping students tested did not make a higher gain in mathematics versus the non-looping students.

Additional analysis was completed using descriptive statistics and the percent of gain increase between School A and School B in reading and in math. Table 6 through Table 9 illustrates the percent of increase of the Reading MAZE and Mathematics CBM for School A and School B along with their respective subgroups. Even though the gains in mathematics were not statistically significant, they were practically significant. Students in School A increased their mathematics scores by 7.81%. Interestingly, students increased their scores in both schools and in every subgroup.

Table 6

Percent of Gain Increase on Reading MAZE and Mathematics CBM for Whole Group

	School A	School B
Reading MAZE:	10.73	6.65
Mathematics CBM:	7.81	18.50

Table 7

Percent of Gain Increase on Reading MAZE and Mathematics CBM for Whole Group Desegregated by Gender

	School A		School B	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Reading MAZE:	9.22	12.30	6.92	6.39
Mathematics CBM:	7.81	7.39	17.67	19.10

Table 8

Percent of Gain Increase on Reading MAZE and Mathematics CBM for Whole Group Desegregated by Socioeconomic Status

	School A		School B	
	Low	High	Low	High
Reading MAZE:	11.06	9.6	6.89	5.77
Mathematics CBM:	8.57	5.2	18.28	18.95

Table 9

Percent of Gain Increase on Reading MAZE and Mathematics CBM for Whole Group Desegregated by Ethnicity

	School A					School B				
	AA	Hispanic	W	A	O	AA	Hispanic	W	A	O
Reading	9.03	12.1	11.2	7	8.33	7.97	4.50	23	N/A	20.5
Mathematics	8.77	9.26	7.33	54	2.33	15.7	20.9	5	N/A	26

Students from both School A and School B showed gains in achievement in reading and in mathematics. In addition, in the subgroups of gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity students increased their performance in every category.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

Chapter five summarizes my research study. It includes the purpose of the study, the research questions, methodology, and the determination of acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis. It also includes the conclusions that were drawn from the findings, and discusses implications and recommendations for future research.

With No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), annual yearly progress, and high stakes state testing, administrators must implement structures and processes that maximize the learning time. In addition, with the growing number of at-risk students, English Language Learners (ELL), and economically disadvantaged students, teachers must also implement best practices with the latest research in the creation of a classroom climate that allows for students to take the needed risks.

Statement of the Problem

Schools today face unprecedented challenges ranging from an increase in student discipline to a lack of parental involvement all while battling a decrease in funding. As the family unit and the educational system have evolved, the school has become forced to take a more reactive approach. Again, the social norm in campus has become two-fold: the students now have a large voice in the daily operations of the campus, and secondly, campus officials now operate with the notion of one will be given respect once respect has been earned. Campus officials are now having to demonstrate and create a relationship of mutual respect within the student-to-teacher or student-to-administrator

relationship rather than simply expecting the student to be respectful because the teacher is the adult.

We know that the beginning of the school year is a time of uncertainty and, because of this, creates stress and anxiety. The teacher still must learn each individual student as a person, as well as where they are academically, and each student's individual learning modality to teach accordingly. ASCD reminds us that there is a clear and constant concern for a lack of time regarding the requirements within campus s and classrooms that promote or hinder the ability to maximize learning (2009). Freiberg and Driscoll reminds us how we know that for learning to be maximized students must take risks. "For students to be able to take the risks required of them to be sources of learning, they need classrooms that feel safe" (2005, p. 330). For this to happen in a 176 day school year, relationships between students and teachers must be built and must be built quickly.

Marshall and Oliva (2010) argue, "The challenges of demographics and of inequities are chronic and remain unresolved by the piled-on years of traditional practice, scholarship, theory, and professional training in educational administration" (p. 11). The authors continue to argue that, "we must move outside the school building and the ordinary central office routines. We must prevail despite attempts by opposing forces to shelter reassuring viewpoints and protect entrenched privileges" (p. 326). For schools to have an impact, all bridges should be constructed and protected from being burned down, for students know the shame from the sense that one does not belong. Educators are forced to become advocates for social justice by peeling back the proverbial onion and getting down to the root causes that are hindering students' learning.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of looping in two Houston area intermediate campus s (grades five and six) in the area of academic success using the AIMSweb Curriculum Based Measure (or General Outcomes Measure). Looping, in this case, is when an assigned set of grade five students will have the assigned classroom teachers in both grade five and then again in grade six. The goal was to determine if there were a statistically significant relationship between a looping classroom and an academic gain in (a) reading and in (b) mathematics.

The following two research hypotheses were used in this study:

Research Question One:

Do statistical differences exist in reading comprehension achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping than those who did not?

Research Question Two:

Do statistical differences exist in mathematics achievement between students in the intermediate level grades who experienced looping than those who did not?

This was a causal-comparative study that compared the reading and mathematics score gains of students that were participating in a looping environment with the reading and mathematics score gains of students that were not participating in a looping environment. A t-test was conducted using the IBM SPSS software to determine if there were a statistical significant level of $p < .05$. The reading and mathematics scores were the

dependent variables, and the independent variables were the students looping and non-looping.

The design of the study utilized quantitative archival data. The quantitative data that was used was a comparison of a group of randomly selected students within a looping environment within School A to those that are not within a looping environment in School B.

Each campus was already required to complete an AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure, or General Outcome Measure. The collected data from the beginning of the year in fifth grade and the middle of the year sixth grade results were used in this study.

The AIMSweb Universal Curriculum Based Measure or General Outcome Measure is routinely used in conjunction with a school's Response to Intervention (RTI) model. According to Pearson Education,

Within AIMSweb there are several assessments available to monitor students' progress within the area of mathematics. Mathematics Computation (M-COMP) assesses basic computation skills, while Mathematics Concepts & Applications (M-CAP) assesses the application of several concepts within the area of mathematics. Both of these assessments are designed for universal screening (also referred to as benchmarking) as well as more frequent progress monitoring.

AIMSweb also provides single skill computation probes (called Math Facts) such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division that are designed to complement M-COMP for frequent progress monitoring. (p. 1)

For reading, the Lexile Framework accurately matches readers with books and instructional resources by measuring both reading ability and text complexity on the same developmental scale. Unlike other systems, the Lexile Framework evaluates reading ability based on actual assessments, rather than generalized age or grade levels.

The two research hypotheses were tested using mean score gains, standard deviations, and t-tests. The results of this study as outlined in Chapter four showed that for the Hypothesis one in reading the hypothesis was accepted and the Hypothesis two in mathematics the hypothesis is rejected.

Therefore, in reading a statistical significance in the reading gain scores from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2011-2012 school year in the students that were within a looping classroom versus a non-looping classroom design model. In mathematics, it was found not to be significant statistical significance in the mathematics gain scores from the 2010-2011 campus year to the 2011-2012 school year in the students that were within a looping classroom versus a non-looping classroom design model. However, even though the data did not show statistically significant differences in the gain scores of School A and of School B in the area of mathematics, student scores did improve. 7.81% of the students in School A increased their mathematics scores as measured by the AIMSweb Benchmark Screener. This is an important finding because it illustrates the need for practitioner based research in schools that examines the data beyond mere statistical significance. Even though the gains were small, they do exist and school officials can conclude that at the minimum looping was not harmful.

Data was collected from 176 students, 88 from School A and 88 from School B, and it is recommended that conducting a similar longitudinal study involving a larger

number of students of a longer period of time would further validate the results of this study.

Benefits of Looping

Research on quantitative studies focusing on the academic benefits of looping as an instructional design model have had inconsistent and mixed results (Brugger, 2003; Gregory, 2009; Hertrich, 2009; Rodriguez, 2006), and the results of this study were mixed as well. Looping has become viewed as a reform practice that is inexpensive and can be easily implemented regardless of the fact that a campus might use a traditional teacher constructed or a nontraditional student constructed style of instruction within the classroom. Increasing student achievement is the ultimate goal of any decision that is made within a school or school system including the decision of whether or not to implement looping; however, there are numerous and multiple benefits reported from looping and these need to be considered. Some of the major benefits include additional learning time, students reporting less anxiety about their teachers, classmates, and the campus. Students also reported being more motivated to come to school so the school's attendance rate is improved. Teachers and parents reported a stronger connection with each other, and teachers and students reported stronger and healthier teacher and student relationships. In addition, teachers reported a greater ability to individualize instruction for their students.

As discussed, all students, at one time or another will experience anxiety, or "general uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, a feeling of tension" (Hansen, 1997, p. 91). There are many effects of anxiety and some can be positive. Regardless, the negative effects can be devastating. We know that:

From the time of the earliest work on this problem, starting with the pioneering work of Yerkes and Dodson (1908), to the present day, researchers have consistently reported a negative correlation between virtually every aspect of campus achievement and a wide range of anxiety measures” (Covington & Omelich, 1987, p. 393)

As a campus leader, structures must be implement that ease students into a comfort zone and focus on the whole child. Hoy and Hoy (2006) asserts that, “Anxiety can be both a cause and an effect of campus failure: students do poorly because they are anxious, and their poor performance increases their anxiety” (p. 154). Again, the number one cause for student anxiety is fear of the unknown. (p. 155). Within a looping classroom, before the first day of school a child knows that when school begins it will be just like last year, thus concluding that the school year can be started smoother without the anxiety.

As with any campus, student achievement is always the number one goal. Knowing this, we must develop ways to alleviate stress and anxiety which may have a decrease on student achievement. Oliva and Pawlas (2004) remind us that “It is the supervisor’s job to stimulate teachers to want to find new and better ways of accomplishing their instructional duties and improving the curriculum” (p. 338). If a teacher works with, knows the strengths and weaknesses of, and really understands an assigned set of students, the teacher will be better equipped to customize his or her staff development to accommodate those needs. Within the traditional one year classrooms, the teacher has to make an educated guess on what trainings are needed, but if the teacher

is able to take the current assessment scores and know that these are the exact areas of concerns and areas for opportunities of improvement, the teacher is able to schedule trainings that help him or her to fill those voids.

Relationship building is the key, and looping provides this opportunity. Liesveld and Miller (2005) clarify that learning is more authentic when a student is able to make connections rather than through rote memorization. When the connections are not there, it becomes the role of the teacher to help make those connections. If a teacher really knows the student, this process can be obtained at a much faster rate than those teachers that are not familiar with a student. Additionally, in the second year of looping, the teacher can help make connections from the previous year. The special bond that can be created between a teacher and a student through a looping classroom allows for the teacher to really get to know and understand the students.

Children tend to be stress-free around people they already know. Chaika (2005) and Burke (1997) identify that children in a looped classroom already have the support systems in place for those who may need stabilizing influences in their home lives. This creates an increased number of opportunities for shy or socially awkward students to develop self-confidence in their abilities and be free from the stress of a possibly making a mistake and them being laughed at. The classroom relationships are strong and positive, allowing time for academics.

As educators, it is necessary to understand the importance of a student seeing the benefit of healthy relationships; otherwise, the relationship will deteriorate and become unproductive. "A key component of improving school environments has been improving

personalization, that is, tightening connections between students and their learning environments (e.g. teachers, other adults, student peers, curriculum, overall campus climate) (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010, p. 3). Looping continues to be the simplest choice in how to overcome these obstacles.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study also provided a basis for further research in several areas. This study did not include the variables of race, gender, Gifted and Talented, accelerated instruction, special education services, bilingual education, or English as a Second Language. Future studies are needed and would be beneficial in all of these particular areas.

This study involved looping for two years, but looping can take place up to four years. Further research is needed to determine the best length of time a student should loop with the same teacher. This study was conducted with students in an intermediate campus. Looping has taken place at the primary, intermediate, middle, and high school levels. Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa (2008) found in a causal-comparative study of the level of students' connectedness within eight different campus s, and they found that younger students, ages seven to nine years old, have less connection to campus and less trust and respect for the teacher. Further study is needed to know what the best age group or campus level for looping is.

Further study needs to take place to determine if the strength of a teacher and teaching style has an impact on the learning rather than simply the looping. Teachers keeping abreast of the latest teaching methods are an important part of this process. Further studies including the desegregation of data to better determine a teacher's effectiveness and could even benefit for a teacher's action plan.

Further study could also benefit the at-risk students by the level of relationship building that is taking place while the students are in a looping setting. If the teacher has explicit plans of addressing and teaching relationship building, this could impact the overall morale that could positively impact the number of disciplinary office referrals and even student attendance by making the student want to come to school. There is a need for stability and the long term relationship. In addition, this study involved students that had three different teachers through departmentalization. Further research is needed to see if the level of collaboration of the team and the amount of common planning and preparation time the team has played a significant role.

This study was centered on the gains scores in reading and mathematics. Further study is needed to determine if there is a difference with the speed of gains in reading or mathematics. Are students more likely to show a greater gain in mathematics in the looping classroom than in reading? In addition, this study did not include research on the additional learning time gained through looping. Further study is needed on the additional learning time. Teachers report up to an additional month of learning time at the beginning of the year. Should the focus be on extra learning time, or working bell-to-bell, or both? Looping gives more learning time, but is there an impact on how that time is utilized?

In this study, School A had a mobility rate almost 13% higher than School B. Rumberger (2002) explains, "Students moving from one campus to another is wide spread in this country" (p.1). He concludes that 15% to 18% of the reasons for the change of campus are because of a change of residency. He also discovered that 30% to

40% of the reasons for the change of campus are non-residency reasons. Further studies on student mobility are needed.

This study utilized all archival and quantitative data. To create a deeper understanding of the looping situation, further studies including qualitative data including interviews of students, parents, and staff or surveys would answer if looping impacts students and families. And if so, how does it impact students' and their families.

Adult Learning Plan

Looping is simple. Looping can be easily implemented and beneficial within any campus setting. The academic benefits include extra teaching time, a stable influence of more than one year, and a help for students to build confidence. In addition, teacher knowledge about a child's intellectual strengths and weaknesses increases and the long term teacher and student relationships improve student performance. To further strengthen relationships, looping allows for teachers to have the ability to assess prior knowledge and reflective experiences for teachers and students to build upon. Some staff development is desirable, but the concept remains the same. Wynne and Walberg (1975) remind us of the basic operation principles of looping by highlighting:

- Schools keep groups of students together over long periods of time. The size of the groups is not as important as the continuity from year to year.
- The teacher is "promoted" along with the students to the next grade.
- The period of time students and teachers stay together is determined by the school personnel. Groups in some districts have stayed together for anywhere from two to five years, although two years seems to be the term most frequently recommended and employed.

- Preparing the teachers adequately for their “new” curriculum yields the best results. (p. 8)

Academically, the benefits outweigh the concerns. As a school, our ultimate job is with student success at the measure of success is through student achievement. ASCD (2009) summarizes these benefits as:

- Teachers gain extra teaching time. “Getting-to-know-you” time becomes virtually unnecessary during the second year.

We don’t lose several weeks each September learning a new set of names, teaching the basic rules to a new set of students, figuring out exactly what they learned the previous year; and we don’t lose weeks at the end of the year packing students back up. (Ratzki, 1988).

- Teacher knowledge about a child’s intellectual strengths and weaknesses increases in a way that is impossible to achieve in a single year.

I had watched my students’ skills emerge and solidify. I was able to reinforce those skills in a style that was consistent over two years. (Jacoby, 1994).

- “Long term teacher/student relationships improve... student performance.” (George, 1987).

Standardized test scores have gone up since the school opened six years ago.

While these results can’t be linked to one particular program, certainly program consistency is one contributing factor. — Joe Belmonte, principal, in *Multi-Year Education: Reaping the Benefits of Looping*. (Checkley, 1995).

- “Long term teacher/student relationships improve job satisfaction for teachers.”
(George & Oldaker, 1985).

According to Maryann Pour Previti, principal of Worcester (MA) Central Catholic Elementary school, the teachers spending two years with the same students are “the happiest people in my building.” (Burke, 1996).

- Multi-year teaching offers tremendous possibilities for summertime learning, such as summer reading lists, mini-projects, and field trips.

The thought of being able to ‘keep the ball rolling’ during the summer recess seemed a logical and educationally sound idea. (Killough, 1996). (p. 11-12)

Socially, students have reduced apprehension about the new school year and the teacher after the first year. Students are able to be provided social skills and cooperative group strategies in subsequent years. Looping encourages a strong sense of community and family ties among parents, students, and teachers that allow for long-term relationships result in an emotional and intellectual climate that encourages thinking, risk-taking, and involvement. The social benefits include:

- Students have reduced apprehension about the new school year and the new teacher after the first year. (Hanson, 1995; Checkley, 1995a).

This is the best first day of school. I can be with my teacher from last year. I can see my friends. I like school. — Larry, a fourth grader (Hanson, 1995).

- Students reap benefits from time spent on developing social skills and cooperative group strategies in subsequent years. (Hanson, 1995).

After being together for two years, some of the kids I didn't know as well, or get along with as well, I get along with better now than I did before. —Jason, an eighth grader (Grant, et al., 1996).

- Looping permits students to get to know one another well, facilitating social construction of knowledge. (Zahorik and Dichanz, 1994).

Students are better able to resolve conflicts and they are more skillful in working as team members to solve problems. (Hanson, 1995).

- Long term relationships result in an emotional and intellectual climate that encourages thinking, risk-taking, and involvement. (Marzano, 1992; Zahorik/Dichanz, 1994).

The students have learned to take risks because they trust each other. — April Schilb, teacher (Checkley, 1995).

- English language learners adjust to their new school and become comfortable with their teacher, developing confidence in their newly acquired language. (Haslinger, Kelly & O'Lare, 1996).

They [the students] begin to share stories and customs from their countries, resulting in global understanding and respect among all the students. (Haslinger, Kelly & O'Lare, 1996).

- Looping encourages a stronger sense of community and family among parents, students, and teachers. (Checkley, 1995).

It's a big school, and having the same parents for two years makes it easier to think of the school as a neighborhood school, because you get to know the families that much more. —Phyllis Sisson, teacher (Grant, et al., 1996).

- Parents embrace looping once they understand its benefits.

It was a very pleasant experience. I just hope the rest of our school years can be as nice as this one has been. — Sheila Green, parent (Grant, et al., 1996). (ASCD, 2009, p. 27)

Again, as a school leader, we must do what we have to do to ensure student success.

Walker (2004) instructs principals to:

- Know students' strengths, areas for growth, and learning styles.
 - Continuity of the instructional program.
 - Work with other teachers who have the same students to develop interdisciplinary and/or integrated units of study.
 - Develop deeper relationships with students and parents.
 - More easily designed curriculum can be done because the prior knowledge of the students is known.
 - More opportunities to help students with special needs who can be included in the regular instructional program.
 - The teachers of special education students know the expectations of the teachers and can be better prepared to meet the needs of the students in the course. (p. 1)
- and continue to provide considerations for implementation including:

- Research and establish the needs of the students and how the program will meet their needs.
- Examine and discuss the available research, literature, and existing programs.
- Staff should design and develop the program.
- Use teacher volunteers to staff the program. Do not use new and inexperienced teachers.
- Solicit support of the central office and community.
- Educate the parents about the program.
- Notify parents in advance and allow them to decide if they want their child in a looping or non-looping program.
- Provide on-going and appropriate staff development.
- Provide access to materials to support the program and curriculum.
- Provide consistent common planning and preparation time for the teachers.
- Balance the students heterogeneously.
- Keep track of attendance, discipline referrals, and grades.
- Evaluate the program and make modifications as necessary. (p. 2)

Conclusion

School reform is a delicate process and a massive undertaking. Campus administrators must be cautious and move methodically in efforts to create a real long-term change in campuses. As with any new endeavor, the efforts might have a great potential for positively impacting students, but without a full level of commitment by all parties involved can create a short-fall. Buy-in is always the first step, and then there becomes the need for accountability.

Making change to an existing system poses much different issues than starting from scratch. School A was able to start from scratch. The campus first opened its doors for the 2010-2011 school year. Careful planning was involved in creating a culture and climate that centered on the looping concept. The school district where School A and School B are located has eleven different intermediate campuses. With full support from central office, School A changed the norm of district and created a campus where every teacher will be teaching at least one class of fifth grade and two classes of sixth grade, or two classes of fifth grade and one class of sixth grade. Then, upon the completion of the school year, each classroom of fifth grade would then become their class/classes of sixth grade.

Once the underlying concept and structures were created, the administration of School A interviewed and selected a teaching staff that knew up front that they would be looping with their students. By doing this, the administration had the complete buy-in of looping with their teaching staff from the onset.

This study provides an excellent example of a school district that provides administrators the flexibility and autonomy to make the needed decisions for their campus. So many times, educational reform becomes a top-down approach and the ones making the most impact on students' lives are not a part of the conversation. As educators, we are continually looking for ways to improve the manner in which we do things, and sometimes we must remember that the best decisions regarding how to teach students are usually made by those who best know the students they are responsible for teaching.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

CONCENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

February 16, 2012

Brandon Keith Carroll
c/o Dr. Steven Busch
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Brandon Keith Carroll,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "A Study to Inform Principals About the Instructional Design, Looping, and its Influence on Student Achievement." was conducted on February 1, 2012.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,



Kirstin M. Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **November 1, 2016**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 12460-EX