

Of Primary Interest

Published by the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education • Winter 1999 Vol. 7 No. 1

Looping: Adding Time, Strengthening Relationships

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“Looping” is an essentially simple concept: a teacher moves with his or her students to the next grade level, rather than sending them to another teacher at the end of the school year (Grant et al., 1996). Some loops are two consecutive years with the same group of students, while others may be three or more years with the same group. Despite enthusiastic practitioners, the experience of European school systems, and favorable research, looping is still uncommon enough in the United States to be considered *innovative* (Burke, 1996).

The available literature on looping is replete with its benefits. Students change from one grade to the next with a minimum of anxiety (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Looping provides children with additional time to build the relationships on which much of children’s learning depends (Checkley, 1995; Haslinger, Kelly, & O’Lare, 1996; Lincoln, 1997; Shepro, 1995). Looping can turn parents

into supporters and promotes stronger bonding between parents and teachers (National School Public Relations Association, 1995; Shepro, 1995). Looping essentially adds an extra month of teaching/learning time during the second year when the typical transitional period at the beginning of the year is virtually unnecessary (Hanson, 1995; Burke, 1996).

Practitioners’ Perspectives

In Project F.A.S.T. (Families Are Students and Teachers), implemented in East Cleveland, Ohio, schools report dramatic effects on both student academic achievement and parental involvement as a result of the “extended family” aspect of looping (Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997). Jacoby (1994) chronicles how her early fears of looping were quickly replaced with gratitude—she describes the time saved in skill assessment, deeper relationships developed with both students and parents, and the particular benefits afforded shy students. For teachers Mazzuchi and Brooks (1992), looping’s “gift of time” is its most beneficial aspect. Teachers are able to provide appropriate activities over the longer two-year period to students who need to master certain basic skills. Jubert (1996) considers looping a parallel to a “close-knit family,” and the additional month of learning at the beginning of year two, one of the “greatest benefits.”

Oxley (1994) recommends dividing large schools into smaller, cross-disciplinary units, with students and teachers staying together for several years. She cites two examples of schools that have successfully utilized extended teacher–student relationships. Ziegler (1993) discusses teacher-advisory groups that remain together for three school years in grades

seven through nine. She includes studies suggesting that such groups promote positive attitudes within student, teacher, and parent populations. George and Alexander (1993) argue that for middle-school students, who generally need a supportive interpersonal structure, a multi-year teacher–student assignment is highly beneficial. A looping classroom with an effective summer component also offers benefits similar to those of year-round schools with respect to momentum and continuity of instruction (Grant et al., 1996; Lincoln, 1997).

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European Experiences

Italian preschools, considered by some the best in the world, utilize a model of three-year assignments of students to teachers, and both parents and teachers as team members (Palestis, 1994). Some German schools utilize multi-year teacher–student groupings for as long as six years, and credit the extended relationship time with assisting students in making the necessary brain connections learning requires (Burke, 1996; Oxley, 1994; Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). Barnes (1980) describes Waldorf education, which originated in Central Europe over 70 years ago and was brought to the United States in 1928, as a similar concept. In Waldorf education settings, one teacher and the same group of students remain together from grade one through grade eight.

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continues on page 2

Research

East Cleveland, Ohio, Schools and Cleveland State University teamed to pilot Project F.A.S.T., which included multi-year teacher-student assignments as a primary program component (Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997). Students in the program exhibited substantially higher reading and mathematics achievement scores on standardized tests than did students in the traditional grade organization, even when both groups were taught *by the same teacher*. In addition to student academic gains, F.A.S.T. teachers reported an increased sense of ownership for student outcomes (both positive and negative), and a heightened sense of efficacy as a result of their increased decision-making autonomy for students. Parents reported feeling more respected by teachers, having more confidence in their children's teachers and administrators, and being more likely to seek the school's assistance with their children.

Studying a three-year teacher-student relationship, George, Spreul, and Moorefield (1987) found that approximately 70% of the teachers reported that teaching the same students for three years allowed them to use more positive approaches to classroom management. Ninety-two percent of them said that they knew more about their students, and 69% described their students as more willing to participate voluntarily in class. Eighty-five percent of the teachers reported that their students were better able to see themselves as important members of a group,

to feel pride in that group, and to feel pride in the school as a whole. Eighty-four percent of the teachers reported more positive relationships with parents, and 75% reported increased empathy with colleagues. The reactions of students in this study were equally favorable and grew more positive with each successive grade level. Ninety-nine percent of the parents in this study, when asked, requested that their child have the same teacher as the previous year (Burke, 1996).

Milburn (1981) studied two elementary schools of similar socioeconomic areas, which were not experiencing major problems. One school used a traditional grade-level structure, and the other used an extended teacher-student relationship approach where students remained with the same teacher for more than one year. This study found that students in the extended relationship school were less likely to report disliking school or to find it "boring." Additionally, the young students in the extended relationship school outperformed their counterparts in the traditional school on basic skills tests.

Conclusion

The practice of looping offers the potential for both academic and social benefits for students. Academically, the literature includes (a) reports of improved student achievement; (b) increased time-on-task through the "extra month" of school during year two of a loop, and the potential for summer learning at the end of year one with the assignment of high interest reading and project activities; (c) more time for slower students to learn basic

skills without the need for retention; and (d) more opportunities for bonding between teachers and students, and teachers and parents. The potential social benefits for students include (a) diminished apprehension about a new school year; (b) more time to establish positive peer relationships; (c) increased support for students who require school as a social safety net; (d) an enhanced sense of school and group as a "community"; and (e) increased opportunities for shy students to develop self-confidence. The only potential disadvantage of looping regularly mentioned is an inappropriate match, or personality conflict, between teacher and student—a situation that can occur in a traditional classroom as well. Such actual problems are rare (Burke, 1996) and can usually be solved by transferring those students to another teacher (Grant & Johnson, 1995).

The social interactions among adults and students are not simply a means to some other end; rather "they are education itself" (Lee et al., 1993). The essence of looping is the promotion of strong, extended, meaningful, positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students that foster increased student motivation and, in turn, stimulate improved learning outcomes for students.

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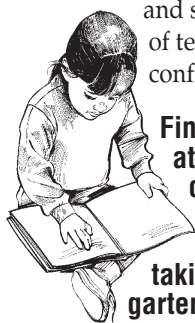
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Quality Preschool Child Care Impacts Second Grade Outcomes

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the effects of preschool experiences—especially child care—on children’s later performance in school. A substantial majority of preschoolers now participate in some form of child care before coming to school. The **Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study**, begun in 1993, was designed in part to examine the influence of typical center-based child care on children’s development during their preschool years and then subsequently as they moved into the formal elementary education system. The **Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study** has now followed these children through the end of second grade, four years after the researchers’ initial contact with them when they were nearing the end of their next-to-last year in child care.

Second Grade Findings

One set of findings answered questions about the extent to which child care experiences affected children’s abilities four years later, after considering the effects of subsequent experiences during this time period. These analyses examined children’s outcomes in the second grade, also taking into account background characteristics. The first finding considered the quality of children’s classroom experiences in kindergarten and second grade, while the second finding considered previous problem behaviors and child care and second grade teachers’ ratings of teacher–child closeness and conflict.



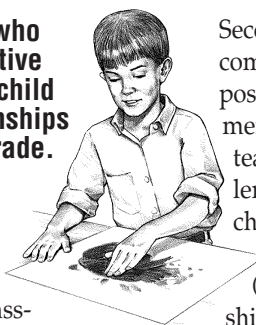
Finding One: Children who attended higher quality child care had better cognitive and social skills in the second grade, even after taking into account kindergarten and second grade classroom experiences.

Child care quality during the preschool years was related to children’s cognitive and social skills in the second grade, after considering background characteristics and the quality of subsequent experiences in kindergarten and second grade. As with the longitudinal findings, children’s math skills related to child care classroom practices, while children’s classroom behavior (thinking/attention skills, problem behavior, and sociability) related to

child care teacher–child closeness. Similarly, better quality child care was more strongly related to fewer problem behaviors in second grade for children with less highly educated mothers. Children’s language and letter–word recognition skills in the second grade were not related to child care quality.

Finding Two: Children who experienced more positive classroom climates in child care had better relationships with peers in second grade.

Children rated higher on aggressive and disruptive behavior in the second grade were more likely to have been in child care classrooms with climates characterized by high levels of problem behaviors and low levels of teacher–child closeness. Similarly, higher ratings of social withdrawal in second grade were associated with child care classrooms characterized by high levels of problem behaviors. Children’s prosocial behaviors in second grade, on the other hand, were predicted by child care classrooms that involved greater peer interaction during play.



Discussion of Second Grade Findings

Children’s cognitive and social competence in second grade can be predicted by the experiences they had four years previously in child care, after taking into account subsequent experiences in elementary school. While there was some evidence of an effect of child care quality on children’s math achievement, most of the effect was seen in the social domain, in terms of second grade classroom behavior and peer relationships. The findings of a long-term influence of child care experiences on children’s second grade outcomes are notable for two reasons.

The effects of child care quality on children’s second grade outcomes hold after considering subsequent classroom experiences.

First, from their next-to-last year in child care through second grade (ages 4 to 8), children have experienced a variety of care and education settings, including the transitions to and experiences in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. The findings of influences of child care quality on second grade outcomes, despite the

variety of subsequent experiences, suggests the long-term importance of early experiences on children’s development.

The social–emotional climates of child care classrooms as well as individual children’s relationships with their teachers are important predictors of children’s outcomes.

Second, the results indicated that social competence with peers was related to positive child care classroom environments (i.e., classrooms with close teacher–child relationships, low problem behaviors, and opportunities for children to play together) in addition to positive teacher–child relationships (both current and earlier relationships). These findings suggest that child care classrooms provide an environment for children to establish patterns of relationships that persist over time and over the transition into elementary school.

The longitudinal and second grade findings mirror one another. The longitudinal findings provide evidence for the effects of child care quality on children’s patterns of growth and development from the preschool years through the early elementary years. Correspondingly, the second grade findings provide evidence for the long-term effects of child care experiences on children’s abilities four years later, after considering the effects of subsequent educational experiences between child care and second grade. Both sets of findings reveal that children who have more positive child care experiences during the preschool years have better outcomes through the elementary school years, after controlling for differences in background characteristics. Whether child care experiences are examined in terms of the global quality of classroom practices, the nature of teacher–child relationships, or the social–emotional climate, more positive experiences are related to better outcomes in both social and cognitive domains.

The above information is excerpted from the Executive Summary of **The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go To School**, June 1999. The summary and other information about the project are available on the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center website <<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~NCELD/PAGES/cqes.htm>>. Researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, University of California at Los Angeles, and Yale University conducted the study.

Second-Grade Literacy Accomplishments

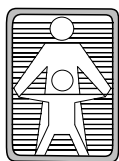
Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998) and **Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success** (1999) present highlights of literacy acquisition, sets of accomplishments that the successful learner should exhibit by the end of each of the primary grades. Although the timing of these accomplishments will vary among children, they are the sorts of things that should be in place before entering the next grade. Accomplishments for a second-grader include:

- Reads and comprehends both fiction and nonfiction that is appropriately designed for grade level.
- Accurately decodes orthographically regular, multisyllable words and nonsense words (e.g., capital, Kalamazoo).
- Uses knowledge of print-sound mappings to sound out unknown words.
- Accurately reads many irregularly spelled words and such spelling patterns as diphthongs, special vowel spellings, and common word endings.
- Reads and comprehends both fiction and nonfiction that is appropriately designed for the grade.
- Shows evidence of expanding language repertory, including increasing use of more formal language registers.
- Reads voluntarily for interest and own purposes.
- Rereads sentences when meaning is not clear.
- Interprets information from diagrams, charts, and graphs.
- Recalls facts and details of texts.
- Reads nonfiction materials for answers to specific questions or specific purposes.
- Takes part in creative responses to texts such as dramatizations, oral presentations, fantasy play, etc.
- Discusses similarities in characters and events across stories.
- Connects and compares information across nonfiction selections.
- Poses possible answers to how, why, and what-if questions.
- Correctly spells previously studied words and spelling patterns in own writing.
- Represents the complete sound of a word when spelling independently.
- Shows sensitivity to using formal language patterns in place of oral language patterns at appropriate spots in own writing (e.g., de-contextualizing sentences, conventions for quoted speech, literacy language forms, proper verb forms).



- Makes reasonable judgments about what to include in written products.
- Productively discusses ways to clarify and refine own writing and that of others.
- With assistance, adds use of conferencing, revision, and editing processes to clarify and refine own writing to the steps of the expected parts of the writing process.
- Given organizational help, writes informative, well-structured reports.
- Attends to spelling, mechanics, and presentation for final products.
- Produces a variety of types of compositions (e.g., stories, reports, correspondence).

The above excerpt is reprinted with permission from **Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success**. Copies of the entire publication are available from the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20055, (800) 624-6242, at a cost of \$14.95 per book. The report is also available online at <<http://www.nap.edu>>.



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