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The impact of looping on academic and social experiences of middle school students

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ABSTRACT

The Impact of Looping on Academic and Social Experiences of Middle School Students

by

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M.A., Albany State University, 2003
B.B.A., Mercer University, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Degree of
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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Brad Gregory

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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ABSTRACT

Georgia school districts have been concerned with the social and academic outcomes of looping middle school students. School district administrators need research-based findings to determine the effectiveness of middle school looping programs which place middle school students and teacher(s) together for 2 or more consecutive years. The purpose of this quantitative study was to analyze standardized testing data and perceptions of 240 middle school students. This study was grounded in the social development theory as it pertains to the academic and social outcomes of adolescent middle school students. The research questions for this study focused on social experiences, conduct, and achievement on standardized tests of looping and nonlooping middle school students. Self-report data were collected through a researcher-designed survey containing Likert-type scale response items. Self-report data, Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square testing, mean comparisons, and the ANOVA one-way test for variance. The findings indicated (a) that looping has a positive impact on the social experiences perceived by middle school students, but (b) has no measurable impact on student conduct, and (c) a positive correlation between reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests and the degree of looping participation. The implementation of the looping design in American middle schools will provide positive social change by increasing academic achievement and positively influencing the social well-being of middle school students. School reform advocates must focus their efforts on promoting the looping design, and school leaders must break away from the traditional middle school concept and select a more appropriate design to better meet the needs of adolescent learners.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

With increasing numbers of students with diverse backgrounds comprising the populations of American middle schools, a challenge is created to provide an idea of smallness and sense of family that enhances the quality of the human relationships involved. The attempt of this reorganization has taken many different forms in schools. Many middle schools are more concerned with the *what* aspect that is to be taught, focusing on changing curricula in the attempt to improve test scores and student achievement. Middle schools administrators tend to overlook the *who* and the ways to positively encourage the influence of that *who*.

The most successful middle schools are those that are strategically designed to create a learning environment to meet the needs of their adolescent students (Manning, 2003). The creation of middle schools was the result of three major factors: (a) A program was needed that addressed the specific needs of adolescents that fall into this age group; (b) A program was needed that provided stability and a smooth transition from one stage of schooling to the next; and (c) The middle school environment was to offer a wide open setting for introduction and implementation of innovative practices (Bushnell et al., 1998). Abramson (2004) suggested that effective middle schools promote the idea of family which encourages children to work together, build relationships, and focus on a attaining a substantial amount of academic knowledge. The middle school setting was meant to act as a transition period for adolescents with the primary focus of meeting their changing physical, emotional, and intellectual needs. Ecker (2002) pointed out that these changes occur faster for the middle school student than any other age student. Therefore,

it is critical that middle schools design programs that allow opportunities for students and teachers to develop relationships that last longer than just 1 year. Successful teaching at the middle school level is directly related to a positive relationship between teachers and students (George & Lounsbury, 2000).

Problem Statement

In the middle school setting, a *loop* refers to one team of teachers cycling through Grades 6 and 7 or Grades 6, 7, and 8 with the same group of students. The term looping refers to the concept of pairing groups of students to the same teacher for 2 or more consecutive years (Forsten, Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1997). The greatest benefit of looping at the middle school level, which serves as its core, is the long-term relationship that is built between the student and teacher (Baran, 2008; Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996).

A Georgia middle school has utilized the looping design since 2000. Implemented with the idea that multiyear teaching provides a wide range of academic and social benefits for the middle school student, it has received mixed reviews from individuals both directly and indirectly involved with the school. In 2006, a survey conducted by the administration revealed that 46 of the 57 teachers at this middle school were not convinced that looping was the best design choice to meet needs of students. Although research supported the concept of looping in both the elementary and middle school setting (Coash & Watkins, 2005; Kenney, 2007), there is a fundamental need at this Georgia middle school to evaluate both the social and academic experiences of its students. The primary concern of decision makers is whether or not the design is the most effective in adequately meeting the social and academic needs of middle school

students. The situation at this middle school called for the researcher to examine student attitudes towards looping. Equally vital was the need to compare relevant testing data of students that have and have not looped to determine any added academic benefits of the looping design.

Few studies have focused on the looping design at the middle school level. In an effort to meet the needs of adolescent students and increase student achievement, many Georgia school districts are in search of the best scheduling programs available. The researcher investigated the impact of looping on eighth grade students at a Georgia middle school. These students were included in the study to determine if the looping design promotes positive social and academic experiences for middle school students.

Research Design

A static group comparison was used as the research design for this quantitative study. Through the analysis of a preexisting survey, the attitudes of eighth grade students at a Georgia middle school were examined and evaluated concurrently with standardized testing data in an attempt to integrate the findings (Creswell, 2003). A comparison was made to the responses and testing data of nonlooping students at the same school. The participants for this study consisted of all eighth grade students at a Georgia middle school. The eighth grade students completed a student looping survey during the 2007 school year.

The researcher is a current administrator and former 8th grade Reading and Language Arts teacher who participated in a 3-year looping. The researcher actively collected data for the study.

Preexisting data from a survey containing closed-ended questions were used. The researcher also attained standardized test results from the 2007 Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment. Standardized testing data from the Georgia CRCT and the 8th Grade Writing Test were matched with student surveys. Survey responses and testing data were categorized.

The researcher scheduled a meeting with the curriculum director and principal of the participating school upon IRB approval, then retrieved student surveys and relevant testing data from school personnel for analysis and interpretation. The surveys gathered from school personnel were administered in alignment to existing curriculum at the participating middle school. The survey was adapted by school personnel from a looping survey cited by Grant et al. (1996). During administration of the survey, school personnel followed the individual education plans of students that received accommodations to ensure the credibility of student responses.

Nature of the Study

This researcher conducted a quantitative study to analyze the attitudes of middle school students toward their looping experience and their academic performance on the Georgia CRCT and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment. Standardized testing data were compared to that of nonlooping students at the same middle school. The completed survey contained closed-ended questions that addressed the students' perception of the academic and social benefits of looping. The survey was administered to 8th Grade students attending a Georgia middle school. Data were correlated to the Georgia CRCT and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment in order to substantiate survey responses and identify actual academic benefits of looping. The researcher cross-checked the data.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. What is the impact of participation in a looping program on the social experiences perceived by eighth grade students?

   H_o: There is no significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on perceived social experiences.

   H_1: There is a significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on perceived social experiences.

2. What is the impact of participation in a looping program on student conduct?

   H_o: There is no significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on student conduct.

   H_1: There is a significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on student conduct.

3. What is the correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students?

   H_o: There is no correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students.

   H_1: There is a correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to analyze standardized testing data from the Georgia CRCT and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment and perceptions of looping students and at a Georgia middle school. The students targeted in this study represented a

demographically diverse group with varying degrees of participation on looping middle school teams. Attitudes toward looping were generally defined as praises and concerns in the areas of design, academics, and social development. In the attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of looping at the middle school level, feedback from students involved in the looping process was examined. The goal of this research study was to analyze the social and academic benefits of looping in order to assist decision makers in determining the effectiveness of the looping design at this Georgia middle school. On a broader scale, these findings challenge the current state of middle school curricula and support the effort of implementing looping in middle schools, nationwide.

Theoretical Framework

The research on looping indicates that relationships built among students, teachers, and parents in looping environments serve as the foundation for student success (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). Looping students are allowed the opportunity to remain in a stable and familiar setting, which fosters a more cohesive learning community (George & Lounsbury, 2000). Positive student outcomes created through looping relationships are supported by Vygotsky's social development theory. Vygotsky (1978) identified social interaction as a fundamental part of cognitive development. The looping environment provides a secure platform for positive social interaction to take place.

The existence of long-term relationships fosters additional benefits, as well. Howard Gardner (1983) identified eight multiple intelligences by which individuals best learn. Based on this theory, teachers should formulate lessons using a wide variety of

instructional strategies in order to reach each student. George and Lounsbury (2000) stated, "Teachers are more effective when they know students well, when they understand how their students learn, and when they have enough time with students to accomplish their goals" (p. 64). Through an extended length of time, the teacher acquires knowledge about each child's strengths and weaknesses (Baran, 2008). With that knowledge, teachers are better equipped to target the specific learning style or intelligence by which each student best acquires knowledge.

Definitions of Terms

Academic Experiences: Academic experiences refer to student achievement in the academic areas analyzed in this study. Student achievement in reading and math was measured by the Georgia CRCT. Student achievement in writing was measured by the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment.

Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT): The Georgia Department of Education (2008) affirms that the CRCT is used to assess how well students attain the skills and knowledge outlined in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). These assessments provide information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels. This information can be used to identify individual strengths and weaknesses in regard to the GPS/QCC, and to measure the quality of education throughout Georgia. The CRCT is administered to all students in Grades 1 to 8 in the state of Georgia. Third, fifth, and eighth grade students are required to pass the CRCT in order to go be promoted to the next grade.

Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment: Students in Grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 are administered performance-based writing assessments. The results are evaluated on an analytic scoring system in all grades and feedback is provided to teachers, students, and parents concerning individual student performance (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). For eighth graders, the assessment takes place over the course of two days and measures the students' ability to use the writing process to respond to an expository or persuasive prompt.

Looping: Looping, also known as multiyear teaching is a program in which students and their teacher(s) stay together for 2 or more consecutive years (Hitz, Jenlink, & Somers, 2007; Grant et al., 1996).

Middle School Teams: Middle school teams consist of two to five teachers who have been aligned with 50 to125 students (Rottier, 2001). Team teachers are departmentalized by subject and responsible for teaching the core subjects of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007).

Social Experiences: Sullivan (1953) identified peer interaction as a vital social experience of children and adolescents. Peer interaction is characterized by peer acceptance, group acceptance, and social connectedness (Sullivan). Social experiences are best distinguished by the relationships formed by students and their feeling of connectedness to individuals and environment. For this study, social experiences consist of student attitudes toward school, student-student relationships, student-teacher relationships, and student behavior.

Assumptions

For this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Student survey participants responded honestly and accurately to the survey items.
2. The Georgia CRCT and Writing Assessment are accurate measures of student academic achievement.
3. Teacher changes that took place during the 3-year cycle did not affect the integrity of the looping experience.

Limitations of the Study

1. Participants in this study were limited to eighth grade students in their final year of middle school during the 2006 – 2007 school year.
2. The sample size in this study was limited to 240 student participants that completed a student looping survey at the end of the 2007 school year. Approximately 20% of the total population of eighth graders chose not to complete the survey and were, therefore, excluded from the study.
3. The study included one of two middle schools in this Georgia school district. At the time of data collection, all classes at the participating middle school utilized the looping design. The looping design was not utilized at the other middle school in the district.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study consisted of eighth grade students at a Georgia middle school. The quantitative analysis consisted of responses to closed-ended survey questions and standardized testing data which was compared between looping and non

looping students. In addition to students whose parents recommended removal from a looping team, the existence of students with discipline issues which were removed by administration as well as transient students with volatile family situations raises apprehension as to whether or not looping is the primary factor influencing achievement on standardized tests. The research in this study was limited to one school that implemented only the looping design. No traditional classroom models are present.

Significance of the Study

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (2002) has made the call for increased academic rigor despite the need of a more sensitive approach to student relationships. With rising emphasis placed on teacher accountability and high stakes testing, reformers are searching diligently to discover the best methods of educating students. The results of this study provide relevant recommendations that could challenge traditional middle school curricula and redefine the nature of how middle school students are taught. The argument of having a competent teacher is resolved by measuring student achievement of both looping and non-looping students who are mixed among the same teams of teachers. As a result, this study has a distinct relevance in relation to existing research.

This study provides middle school teachers and administrators with valuable information on the views of students in regard to looping and its correlation to academic performance on standardized tests. The findings from this study could prove useful in determining if the looping format succeeds in meeting the academic and social needs of middle school students and should, therefore, be maintained. Useful information is presented to decision makers by compiling essential data showing the perceptions of

students directly involved in the looping program at a Georgia middle school. A second vital component of this study is the analysis of Georgia CRCT and Georgia Writing Assessment results of both looping and nonlooping students. Through a deeper understanding of students' perspectives and academic successes, schools can become better equipped to determine the best way reach each student.

Implications for Social Change

Students are faced with an ongoing barrage of instability from their surroundings. Issues such as poverty, family structure, peer pressure, and increased access to all forms of information plague the minds of American children. The middle school years are a critical time of human growth and development when children must be nurtured in a specific learning environment where stability, encouragement, and support are cultivated (Abramson, 2004; Eichorn, 1966). The stronger bonds formed in looping environments among students, teachers, and parents enhance the overall success of adolescent students (George & Lounsbury, 2000; Grant et al., 1996; Sergiovanni, 2005). For positive social change to take place, middle school administrators must investigate the implementation of looping in every American middle school. In order for this paradigm shift to take place in American middle schools, steps must be made through pilot programs and vigorous program promotion so that the looping design is given an opportunity to demonstrate its full merit.

Summary

This study provides stakeholders with valuable information that can be used to better address the social and academic needs of middle school adolescents. Looping research identifies the long term relationships that develop between teachers, students, and parents as the cornerstone of its success. Despite the vast amount of research on the advantages of looping, current looping research involving middle school adolescents is limited. The findings in this study offer important information for those decision makers in search of the best ways to meet the social and academic needs of middle school students.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five sections, references, and appendixes. Section 1 provides an introduction to the study and identified the problem statement, guiding research questions, purpose, theoretical framework, and significance of the study. In section 2, a review of the related literature associated with looping and the middle school concept is presented. In section 3, the research design and methodology utilized in the study are presented. Also presented in section 3 are the population, data collection instrument, data analysis and an explanation of the protection of participants' rights. In section 4, the data were analyzed and the findings are presented. Section 5 consists of the summary, conclusions, and future recommendations. The bibliography, appendixes, and curriculum vitae conclude the study.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of looping on the academic and social experiences of middle school students. A strategy for searching the literature was developed to ensure that relevant and useful information was located. In developing this strategy, the researcher reflected upon personal experiences as a middle school looping teacher to help determine the purpose, scope, and research questions utilized in this study. Keywords and phrases were identified so that scholarly literature could be located to provide theoretical framework, background information, and current research directly related to the research questions. This literature review is organized according to specific areas addressed in the research questions for this study. Background information is provided to show the current state of the educational system and the need for middle school reform. The history of looping is presented and followed with detailed information on the middle school movement. Next, the social and academic benefits of looping are discussed. Finally, the challenges associated with looping are presented.

Background

When NCLB (2002) was signed into law on January 8, 2002, the era of federally mandated accountability and high academic standards began. Academic expectations for state and local school systems were raised. The fear that schools were not adequately preparing students for the workforce served as the driving force behind this intense focus on standards, academic achievement, and accountability (Baran, 2008). NCLB specifies that all students will meet or exceed the state standards in the areas of reading and math

by 2013. NCLB mandated that all states establish statewide academic standards and a testing system that meets federal guidelines (Paige, 2002).

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) serves as the foundation of NCLB. Based on NCLB guidelines, a school can achieve AYP status by meeting standards in three areas. These areas include test participation, academic performance, and a second indicator. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2008), in order to meet AYP in Georgia for a given year, a school must have a 95% participation rate and must meet or exceed annual measurable standards on the Georgia CRCT in Math and Reading. To achieve the second indicator, a school must meet or exceed the annual measurable standards on the Georgia CRCT in Math and Reading for a subgroup of at least 40 students. Special Education students, English learners of another language, the economically disadvantaged, or minority groups could serve as the second indicator for a school. In 2008, one out of every three middle schools in the state of Georgia did not meet AYP. A total of 340 schools, state wide, were placed on the needs improvement list for failure to meet annual measurable objectives (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Educational reform advocates are continually searching for ways of restructuring schools to best meet the academic and social needs of students. Although educational reform is much needed throughout the field of education, one of the greatest areas of need is that of the American middle school. Research contends that a majority of middle school aged adolescents experience a decline in achievement due to decreased academic motivation (Finger & Silverman, as cited by Baran, 2008). Researchers have also documented decreases in the areas of school satisfaction, attitudes towards academic and

non-academic subjects, and response to teachers (Haladya & Thomas, 1979; Hirsch & Rapkin, as cited by Baran, 2008). The needs of middle school adolescents transcend that which is offered by traditional middle school settings. When the needs of these students are left unmet, and the education of our youth is inhibited, a chain reaction begins that has the potential of producing catastrophic effects for the future of our society.

Looping is a viable option to address student needs in American middle schools. The term, looping, refers to the concept of pairing groups of students to the same teacher for two or more consecutive years (Grant et al., 1996). In the middle school setting, "a loop" refers to one team of teachers cycling through Grades 6, 7, and 8 with the same group of students. In the traditional middle school, students are expected to learn new routines and expectations every year as they are placed with an entirely new group of teachers. Teachers are also expected, each year, to learn the needs of an entirely new group of students and are held accountable for their success. Looping teams create the type of environment which promotes true learning communities that are distinguished by the growth of interpersonal relationships among teachers, students, parents, and administrators (George & Lounsbury, 2000). Looping also lessens the degree of anxiety and offers middle school students more confidence so that they have a better opportunity to flourish both socially and intellectually (Gaustad, 1998). In like manner, looping produces the same results for parents and teachers by minimizing, fear, anxiety, and frustration through the creation of meaningful relationships (Grant & Johnson, 1995).

The social interaction that evolves between adults and students acts as education in its truest form. Research (Grant et al., 1996; Hitz et al., 2007; Nichols, 2002) showed that a strong sense of community and stability is created for students that have the same

teacher and classmates in consecutive years. Sergiovanni (2005) stated that these bonds "are the missing ingredient in too many schools, and despite good wishes and valiant efforts this void makes teaching and learning an upstream swim" (p. 72). The power of looping exists through the promotion of meaningful, long term relationships between teachers and families which increases student motivation and enhances learning outcomes for students (Burke, 1997; Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). The close-knit family that is created through these relationships thrives on "learning, growing, and developing into life-long learners" (Grant et al., 1996, p. 37).

History of Looping

The concept of a teacher moving from one grade to the next with his/her students is certainly not a new development. The early roots of looping can be found in the time of the one room schoolhouse, when a teacher had no choice but to teach students for more than one academic year. Grant, Richardson, and Forsten (2000) noted that a 1913 memo from the U.S. Department of Interior saw looping as an important issue facing urban schools. It posed the question:

> Shall teachers in graded schools be advanced from grade to grade with their pupils through a series of two, three, four, or more years so that they may come to know the children they teach and be able to build the work of the latter years on that of the earlier years, or shall teachers be required to remain year after year in the same grade while the children, promoted from grade to grade, are taught by a different teacher every year. (p. 2)

According to George and Lounsbury (2000), just 2 years later, the Bureau of Education in the Department of Interior issued a report concerning the assignment of teachers. It declared that "an unfortunate application of the doctrine of efficiency has led

to the mechanical, unprogressive assignment of teachers" (Bureau of Education, p. 37). Although advocated by the Bureau of Education, looping was disregarded over the next few decades. Around the same time, the Waldorf Schools were founded in Germany by Rudolf Steiner. These schools were created to educate the children of the factory workers at the Waldorf-Astoria. Steiner recognized the value of long-term relationships between teachers and students. Steiner noticed that since the parents worked such long hours, the students lacked the opportunities to build relationships with an adult. Steiner thought that if these students could build meaningful, long-term relationships with teachers, it would help compensate for the lack of time spent with parents. As a result, Waldorf teachers looped with their students for 8 years (Hitz et al., 2007; NIREL, 1997).

Other successful looping models, which mimicked the Waldorf design in the early 1900s, could be found in Japan, Israel, Sweden, and Italy. In 1928, the success of the Waldorf Schools inspired the United States to implement the progression of teachers and students in many of its schools. Around the 1950s and 1960s, however, the consolidation of smaller schools into larger ones discouraged the practice of looping. Parents came to expect a separate teacher for each grade level. Teachers were then perceived to be assigned only to one grade level. They were considered specialists in their grade instead of specialists of educating children (Gelman, 2001).

In the early 1990s, contemporary education experts began to rediscover looping and its benefits. Pilot programs were started in Massachusetts, Illinois, and Minnesota which experienced tremendous success in promoting student achievement in the middle school levels. As more research is found that demonstrates the success of such programs,

educational leaders will be required to take a serious look at implementation of looping (Grant et al., 1996).

The Middle School Movement

The middle school movement started in the early 1960s as a result of dissatisfaction in the junior high school model. Juvonen (2004) affirmed that junior high schools had begun too closely resembling senior high schools in the areas of content emphasis, departmentalization, and strict scheduling. The Civil Rights Movement and other social changes in the United States also influenced reorganization efforts. As the number of middle schools increased, junior high schools became less prevalent. In 1965, there were nearly 500 middle schools up and running in the United States. By 1970, the number had increased to more than 2,000 active middle schools. Alexander (1981) outlined a new middle school concept in his book, *The Exemplary Middle School.* Alexander pointed out that serving as a bridge between elementary and high school was not enough. Alexander stressed that an "an effective middle school must not only build upon the program of earlier childhood and anticipate the program of secondary education to follow, but it must be directly concerned with the here-and-now problems and interests of its students" (p. 2). This school of thought was embraced and by 1990, over 15,000 middle schools were thriving in the United States. The growth of middle schools has been tremendous, and it is evident that what was once a trend is now common practice (Bushnell et al., 1998).

The creation of middle schools is based on three major factors: (a) A program was needed that addressed the specific needs of adolescents that fall into this age group; (b) a

program was needed that provided stability and a smooth transition from one stage of schooling to the next; and (c) the middle school environment was to offer a wide open setting for introduction and implementation of innovative practices (Bushnell et al., 1998). The aspect that makes a large part of the case for middle schools is the need for human growth and development. Abramson (2004) stated that neither the rules of the elementary schools nor the liberties of the high school cultivate success for adolescents aged 11 through 15. Abramson further declared that good middle schools promote the idea of family which encourages children to work together, build relationships, and focus on a attaining a substantial amount of academic knowledge (2004).

The term transescence, created by Eichorn (1966), fully depicts this crucial stage of development. Instead of characterizing adolescence as a progressive stage, Eichorn viewed it as a transitory phase when individuals are met with many physical, social, and emotional changes in the body. Unlike traditionalists, Eichorn did not view the adolescent age group as unmotivated and hormone driven. Eichorn stated that this distinct stage of physical and emotional development called for a specific learning environment that provided the necessary support.

The transition between elementary and middle school is often associated with a multitude of psychological and academic declines (Parker, 2009). The middle school setting was meant to act as a transition period with the primary focus of meeting the changing physical, emotional, and intellectual needs for this age group of students. Successful middle schools are designed in a manner in which they meet the needs of their adolescent students (Manning, 2003). Ecker (2002) pointed out that these changes occur faster for the middle school student than any other age student. Therefore, flexibility and

balance must exist within the learning modalities. Close relationships among students, teachers, and parents are vital for success. Middle schools must possess personnel that take a proactive and caring approach to the well-being of each child. L'Esperance, Hoose, and Strahan (2001) referred to a 1989 study of 97 middle schools that have achieved success by implementing several key components of the middle school concept: (a) creating small communities for learning, (b) empowering teachers and administrators to make decisions, (c) staffing middle school grades schools with teachers that are experts at teaching young adolescents, (d) improving academic performance by encouraging the health of adolescents, (e) including the families of adolescents in their education, and (f) connecting schools with the communities. All of these components can easily be traced back to the concepts of committed people and lasting relationships. By addressing these specific areas within the middle school the opportunity for student success is maximized.

Most research (Elias & Rosenblatt, 2008; Parker, 2009) on the transition to middle school describes negative outcomes. There are, however, specific interventions that research suggests that address social, organizational, and motivational factors. These include creating smaller communities within the school, utilizing teaming and cooperative learning, eliminating tracking, empowering teachers, and improving relationships between students and teachers (Akos, 2002). Rutter (1979) identified the insignificance of traditional concerns for middle schools by those that are new or uninformed about the fundamental nature of middle level education. Rutter's team found that the most important differences in schools relied on whether or not the school successfully catered to the social aspect of learning. Rutter stated that it was vitally important that teachers and students come to view themselves as part of the same group

or family. This unity is the factor that determined if the students shared the educational goals of the teacher, which, in the end, led to higher achievement (George & Lounsbury, 2000).

A 2004 report conducted by the RAND Corporation on the challenges facing American middle schools concluded that middle schools continue to fall short of meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of adolescent students. Student achievement continues to be much lower in middle schools as opposed to elementary schools on standardized tests. National achievement tests reveal that the majority of eighth grade students are not proficient in the areas of math, reading, and science. This lack of proficiency is significantly higher for African Americans and Latinos. A more rigorous approach to educating adolescent students is needed (Juvonen, 2004).

Benefits of Looping

The concept of looping is built on a foundation strikingly similar to that of the middle school concept itself. For this reason, the benefits of looping in the middle school environment exceed that of the traditional format of having a different team of teachers each year. Research (Baran, 2008; Bulau, 2007; Grant et al., 1996; Hitz et al., 2007) supports many positive aspects of looping in the middle school environment in regards to behavior, attitudes, student connectedness and academic achievement.

The greatest benefit of looping at the middle school level, which serves as its core, is the long-term relationship that is built between the student and teacher (Baran, 2008; Grant et al., 1996). When students experience positive, long-term relationships it equips them with the ability to better achieve the goals of middle school education:

academic engagement, personal development, and group citizenship. Traditional middle schools that break up classes or teams each year and assign them to new teams or different teachers impede the ability of the student to form these important, long-lasting relationships. In most cases, it takes a considerable amount of time in a school year for a student to become comfortable with students and teachers on their middle school team. Just as students begin to feel safe and stable in their environment where they can explore themselves socially and academically, the team is broken up and the cycle must begin again. Looping offers the opportunity for students to remain in a stable and familiar setting where they are not forced to start over (George & Lounsbury, 2000; Hitz et al., 2007). Students placed in these small, more personalized learning communities attend class more often, drop out less, encounter less violence, and make better grades (Silver, 2004). Students that are placed with different teachers or different groups of peers from year to year have difficulty developing strong cohesive groups and worthwhile bonds with teachers. According to Nichols (2002), practices such as class reduction or cooperative learning may not fully promote the existence of cohesion. Nichols asserted that cohesion is best achieved through continuous teacher-student, teacher-parent, and student-student relationships which are formed over more than one year of interaction.

Every practice that is implemented should place the needs of students at its forefront. Looping benefits students in many ways, both socially and academically. In addition to an increased comfort level, they are more confident and prepared after the initial year. The longer period of time allows them to improve their interpersonal skills and develop significant relationships. In doing so, they are becoming more prepared to handle future social challenges that they may experience. Once a certain level of trust is

built, which can only happen over an extended period of time, students are encouraged to think, take risks, and work together to resolve conflicts (NIREL, 1997).

Fitz, Hofmann, and Sherman (2002) conducted a study on middle school students to determine student satisfaction with looping and middle school teaming. In their study, students responded, overwhelmingly, in support of the social aspects of middle school looping. They were most satisfied with the relationships that they had forged with students and people. Bulau (2007) supported this claim on student satisfaction in a study of the impact of looping on student connectedness. Bulau concluded that looping students and parents felt an increased sense of belonging to their learning community which positively influenced their overall feelings about school. Kerr (2002) found that even students that did not agree with the looping design commented that their relationships with their friends were stronger because of looping.

Anxiety and uncertainty about the new school year are taken away through looping, and students and teachers are able to feel more relaxed and comfortable going into the next academic year (Gaustad, 1998). Looping teams are able to bypass the orientation phase that traditional middle school teams face each year. The Northeast and Islands Regional Education Laboratory at Brown University insist that teachers do not lose time at the beginning of each year learning names, teaching rules, and assessing prior knowledge. At the end of the year, time spent packing students up is also saved (1997). Burke (1997) agreed that by the beginning of the second year, an extra month of instructional time is gained. Crosby (1998), who was involved in the implementation of looping in a Massachusetts middle school, claimed that even more instructional time can be gained if summer months are utilized. According to Crosby, students can be assigned

special projects that align with the curriculum. As a result, up to 4 months of instructional time could be added over a 2 year span.

The extra teaching time that is created allows teachers to gather a firm grasp on the prior knowledge of each student because they had a hand in developing it. As the teacher moves up to the next grade with that child, the possession of this information is highly advantageous. They can easily pinpoint which skills to reinforce for specific students without having to go through the exploration stage of identifying weak areas each year. As a result, student motivation, attitude, and academic performance are improved (Baran, 2008).

Increased parent involvement also serves as a positive by product of looping. As deep relationships are built, they encourage a stronger sense of family among students, parents, and teachers (Hitz et al., 2007; NIREL, 1997). Through looping, parents are encouraged to take a more proactive role by becoming more familiar with their child's teacher. Looping creates a rapport with parents that leads to more trust, less anxiety, more communication, and increased involvement. Positive communication could very well be the greatest benefit that looping has on the parent-teacher relationship. Just like the students, it may take a parent most of the year to become comfortable with the teacher. With looping, teachers find that parents that did not participate in the first year begin to participate more in the second year through volunteering or various other ways (Grant & Johnson, 1995). In a study by the National Middle Schools Association in a Gainesville, FL, eighty-four percent of teachers overwhelmingly observed more positive relationships with parents of the children on their looping team (Grant et al., 2000). In a 1997 study in the Midwest, 455 parents of looping and nonlooping students were

surveyed. When they were compared, the responses from looping parents were more positive in regard to parent and student attitudes toward the school and towards student motivation. In the same study, low income families and single parent families supported looping more than that of higher income and two-parent families. This aspect can be directly linked to the fact that looping teams provide a greater sense of family, which serves as a substantial need for children from low income or single parent families (Nichols, 2002). Regardless of the background of the parents, looping offers the interpersonal approach needed to increase the positive involvement of parents in the looping family.

Student discipline is a component of the middle school environment that has received some of the greatest assistance through looping. There are a couple of theories that exist as to why student discipline problems decline on looping teams (Nichols, 2002; Lincoln, 1998). One such theory identifies that the long-term relationship that is formed makes teachers more willing to try alternative behavior management strategies when traditional methods fail. Because teachers knew that they would not be finished with the student at the end of the year, they make a greater effort to reach the student. The developed relationship, in most cases, prevents the teacher from "writing off" difficult students (Nichols, 2002, p. 2).

According to Lincoln (1998) and Gilliam (2005), the presence of looping has a positive impact on the number of office discipline referrals and behavior of students. In a Tolland, Connecticut middle school, looping eighth graders were referred less than the non-looping group, even though the looping students had been referred more frequently the previous year (Lincoln, 1998). Grant et al. (2000) confirmed that the research from

the Attleboro, Massachusetts study revealed that middle school discipline referrals dropped significantly with the implementation of the looping design. Forsten et al. (1997) suggested that this decrease in the amount of discipline problems by year two of the loop is due to enhanced parent-teacher relationships and the fact that students have an understanding of teachers' expectations. In describing the looping class of Melissa Fleischer, O'Neil (2004) pointed out that not only are their fewer discipline problems, but kids are more inclined to help each other out.

Looping has also been shown to have a positive effect on classroom management. According to Grant et al. (2000), when strong bonds are made between students and teachers, there is a vital knowledge of behaviors, attitudes, and individual problems. A National Middle Schools Association study of looping at a Gainesville, Florida school found that 70% of teachers believed that looping with the same group of students for 3 years created a more positive approach to classroom management (Grant et al., 2000). Teachers are able to continually adjust their classroom management techniques to respond to each child's need. This theory mirrors the aspect of looping that deals with academic growth, however, it speaks to the component of social growth and interaction. Many principals and teachers that have been involved in looping agree that classroom management is improved through the environment that it creates (Grant et al., 2000).

George and Lounsbury (2000) conducted a national study during the 1995-1996 school year to identify the effect on middle schools of implementing looping or other methods of long-term relationships. Sixty schools, representing 14 states, were deemed appropriate subjects to respond to a survey about their practices. Of the 33 middle schools that completed the survey, about one third consisted of schools that utilize

looping with its entire population. The other schools had a range of up to half of their population looping to just pilot teams. The findings of these surveys were favorable for looping. Participants expressed tremendous benefits in the following areas: (a) classroom management, (b) knowledge of students and parents, (c) involvement with students and parents, (d) development of a sense of community and family, (e) teacher caring for and investing in students, (f) Accurate diagnosis of the needs of students, (g) instruction based on student needs, and (h) improved teacher relationships.

The national study conducted by George and Lounsbury (2000) also had a student and parent component which offered further support for positive social outcomes associated with looping. The results, though positive, were a bit more modest than that of the educators. Students, in general, were positive about the relationships developed with their teachers. Students felt that these long-term relationships formed with the teacher aided in improving their relationships with other students. Students also believed that being part of the team allowed them to create better and stronger friendships with different students. A majority of the students reported that being part of a team resulted in more self-confidence and self-esteem. Students also recognized the need for good teachers in order to form a successful looping team. Parents agreed that the long-term teacher-student relationships allowed teachers to know their child better and be more accepting of their child. A large majority of the parents supported looping and believed that it helped their children succeed academically. Although most parents did not report personality conflicts with teachers, some agreed that a poor teacher can ruin a program. One area, in which parents split, was whether the long-term relationships encouraged parents to visit and if they actually got to know their child's teacher better. Many parents

felt that the potential for having a poor teacher is what concerned them the most. One parent commented that a drawback of the system is that it is harder to leave good teachers at the end of eighth grade. Another parent stated, "I have seen major growth in self-esteem and leadership in my child since becoming involved in this program two years ago" (p. 102). Others commented that extended time allowed the teachers to know their children better. Overall, the responses from both students and parents were favorable in regard to perceived benefits.

Another noteworthy study that dealt with the positive social outcomes of looping was the Delta Project. Hart, Mizelle, and Pate (1993) conducted this 3 year study involving a looping team of four interdisciplinary teachers and their students in a rural Georgia community. As teachers moved through Grades 6, 7, and 8 with the students, they made use of cooperative learning and student collaboration in a variety of learning activities to help promote a community of learners. Student motivation was enhanced as a result of the relationships built between students and teachers. Student interviews also revealed that the increased cooperation and interaction that evolved through the looping process led to better self esteem and improved attitudes toward school. Many students indicated that they enjoyed looping and felt that the teachers understood them better and cared for their needs.

Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the academic successes associated with looping. Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1997) took the results of the Delta Project even further by advocating the existence of improved academic achievement for students participating in this study. Their findings showed that student mastery in the areas of reading and mathematics is enhanced when teachers are allowed

to loop with students. Arenz and Rodriguez (2007) showed a significant difference in the areas of writing, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in favor of looping students over nonlooping students. In another study where student achievement on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) was measured, Fuller (2006) found that looping students showed greater improvement than nonlooping students in eight out of nine statistical comparisons. Shultis (2002) also claimed that parent and teacher study participants reported higher academic achievement among third and fifth grade looping students.

Students bring a diverse set of cultural, socio-economic, ethnic, and ability factors to their educational experience. These individual characteristics have significant influence on the way each child processes and understands information (Curry, 2003). Gay (2004) asserted that many ethnically diverse student populations often feel unmotivated and unwelcome in traditional school settings. It is the responsibility of educators to foster schools that welcome all students, teach them to work together, and encourages their unique abilities (Berman, 2003; Eisner, 2004). The looping design has proven to be beneficial for these types of students with special needs. This category also includes students that are receiving special education services or those that are at-risk of being referred or held back. A looping teacher has the advantage of having more time to make difficult decisions on whether to the refer students for special services (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Many times, one year does not give a teacher enough time to fully assess some students and a great injustice would be done by labeling a child that you are not quite sure about. However, over a 2- or 3-year cycle, the teacher has the necessary time to specifically identify if there is a need for special services. For those who are

immature developmentally or academically behind, the looping environment offers an opportunity to catch up (Tipton, 2004). Under other circumstances, this student could very easily be labeled as special or be retained (Gelman, 2001). Less background information has to be reviewed at the beginning of the year, IEP goals are already known, and communication with parents is already in place (Bafile, 2003). Looping lessens the high-stakes decisions that would normally be made after that first year by giving the teacher the chance to keep evaluating the borderline students (Grant & Johnson, 1995).

Challenges of Looping

On the other hand, people are, naturally, fearful of change. Although research has shown many positive effects of looping in the middle school environment, many people that are directly involved with middle school education will ignore this research and side with familiarity and tradition. Although looping can create tremendous positive gains, the negative impact can also be substantial (Gaustad, 1998). For those that attempt to change and take advantage of this innovative practice, there are certain fears that must be laid to rest.

According to Gaustad (1998), the greatest concern of parents is the possibility that their child will be placed with an ineffective teacher for more than one year. The possibility of getting a new teacher, or one that may possess weaknesses in certain areas could happen. In several instances, parents have wanted to move their child because of personality clashes between teacher and student. Hume (2007) agrees that when a student is placed with an ineffective teacher in a looping program, the impact on learning can be catastrophic. For this reason, it is important that administrators take specific steps

in implementing a proper system of looping that contains various safeguards. One measure that administrators use in regard to new teachers is to exclude them from looping teams until they are comfortable teaching one grade level. Grant (1996) believed that new or weak teachers can be matched with stronger teachers so that they can learn what works.

In a 1997 study conducted by George and Shewey, parents of looping students revealed serious concerns. Forty percent of the parents responding to the survey felt that looping did not allow them to know their teachers better. Recurring responses from the comment section of the survey showed that parents were most concerned with their children having a bad teacher or team of teachers for more than one year. They were also apprehensive of their children being exposed to fewer students as opposed to traditional programs. In another study, Chapp (1999) surveyed 162 administrators that had implemented some degree of looping in their schools. The greatest concerns for administrators dealt with parents' acceptance of the design and teacher-parent personality conflicts.

Teachers also possess several concerns that, if not addressed, can greatly affect the success of a loop. All teachers have had that "bad class," and experienced the feeling of relief as the school year came to a close. For looping teachers, this relief is pushed further down the road. Middle school teachers that face this predicament should have options. One option is to make sure that in the second year, certain groups of students on the team are not grouped together in the same classes. Another option is to change a difficult student to a different team. Unfortunately, a difficult child is one who needs stability and continuity the most; however, teachers should not feel required to handle

difficult children that keep other children from learning. This aspect of looping presents the most difficult dilemma. There are also times when a teacher may not possess a positive relationship with a certain parent. Again, the teacher should not have to endure this negative relationship, long term (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Administrators and teachers should include a policy that reviews all placements at the end of each school year (NIREL, 1997). It is also vital that teachers *buy in* to the program. If possible, teachers should have a choice of whether or not to loop. A contributing factor to the success of the Delta Project, which was mentioned earlier, was the existence of teacher choice. The four teachers, collaborating with other researchers, selected the looping design because of the potential impact it had to create a positive experience for middle school students (Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997).

A high degree of care should also be taken when handling class composition. Grant et al. (1996) warned against overloading looping classes with students with special needs. Looping teams should be heterogeneously mixed within a school and such students should be evenly distributed (Grant et al.). Moses (2006) pointed out that many teachers are apprehensive when faced with the reality of teaching a different grade each year. This issue, however, can be easily addressed through staff development, extra materials and planning time (Gaustad, 1998). To be successful, teachers should acquaint themselves with the curriculum for all grade levels that they are expected to loop. By doing so, teachers are aware of requirements of each grade and can plan for the long term. Ideally, more emphasis should be placed on the ability of a teacher to build a relationship with the adolescent child, than the ability of the teacher to teach a subject (George, 2001).

Beldon (2003) pointed out a major concern of parents in that mismatches may be made between the teacher and student. In these cases, the personality of the student may not be compatible to that of the teacher. To address this concern, schools could offer parents and teachers the option of not allowing a child to continue in the looping program. Schools may also allow parents to choose between a looping or standard team if they coexist in the school. If they do not, parents could be given the opportunity to place their child with the team that they feel contains the best match for their child. In order for looping to overcome the issue of effective personnel, it must be flexible.

Cassidy and Hegde (2004) agreed that teachers should always be given an option of looping. It is important that individuals are not forced into this long-term relationship. Parents should also be given opportunities to voice concerns that they have with the design. In the ideal looping situation, parents and teachers should maintain proper communication and periodically sit down together and reflect the looping process and be willing to make any modifications that are needed (Cassidy and Hegde, 2004). In the next section, this researcher describes the research design, the population, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis.

Summary

The literature included a review of NCLB, the history of looping, and the middle school movement. The needs of adolescent learners was addressed and synthesized with the benefits and challenges of the looping design. The section also included previous looping studies which addressed both social and academic outcomes of students. Section

3 will identify the research design, the population, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if social and academic benefits exist for students participating in a looping program at a Georgia middle school. In this section, this researcher describes the research design, the population, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This researcher conducted a quantitatively designed study to investigate the impact of looping on the academic and social experiences of middle school eighth grade students. The following research questions and hypotheses were used to guide the study:

1. What is the impact of participation in a looping program on the social experiences perceived by eighth grade students?

   H_o: There is no significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the non-looping situation on perceived social experiences.

   H_1: There is a significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the non-looping situation on perceived social experiences.

2. What is the impact of participation in a looping program on student conduct?

   H_o: There is no significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the non-looping situation on student conduct.

   H_1: There is a significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the non-looping situation on student conduct.

3. What is the correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students?

H_o: There is no correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students.

H_1: There is a correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students.

Research Design

The quantitative research design utilized in this study was a static group comparison. Since the essence of this study was to determine the benefits of looping for middle school students, a comparison was made between looping and nonlooping middle school students. Creswell (2003) stated that the quantitative approach "employs strategies of inquiry such as surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data" (p. 18). Creswell also confirmed that the static group comparison calls for the researcher to compare an experimental group to a comparison group through the use of a posttest. The research questions for this study required the examination of preexisting data from student surveys of both looping and nonlooping students at a Georgia middle school to identify any perceived social and academic benefits of the looping design to the students. The research also called for a comparison Georgia Reading, Writing, and Math standardized test results between the two groups.

This quantitative method was chosen based on the existence of the treatment (looping) group and the comparison (nonlooping) group at this Georgia middle school. The Georgia CRCT served as the posttest. Single group designs were not feasible due to

the comparative nature of the data. Likewise, designs consisting of a pretest were not applicable because of the existence of a comparison group. Qualitative methods were also rejected for this study in order to provide a statistical approach to this inquiry and better address the gap in existing research. The data collection process extended over approximately one month. No significant time was taken away from instruction or other teacher obligations. The length of time for data collection, low expense, and ease of interpreting the data also were taken into consideration.

Setting and Sample

This study was set at a middle school in Georgia. This middle school is one of two middle schools in a system that also contains 10 elementary schools, one high school, and approximately 8,900 students. All schools in the district are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The population for this study was 4 eighth grade teams consisting of approximately 300 students with various degrees of participation in the looping process. Each team was comprised of three regular education teachers and no more than 80 students. In addition, two teams each possessed one special education inclusion teacher. The researcher served as the Reading and Language Arts teacher for one of these teams.

Creswell (2003) pointed out that with random sampling, each individual has an equal chance of being chosen from the population, guaranteeing that a representative sample is selected. Due to the nature of the study and the relatively low number in the population, a non-random sample was used. Even though the individuals were selected based on their participation in the year end looping survey, all students were given the

opportunity to complete the survey during the survey window. Therefore, all students had an equal probability of being selected for the sample. In order to increase the validity of conclusions and ensure that a proper representation of the population was achieved, 240 8th grade students that completed the student looping survey at the end of the 2007 school year were included. This number represented approximately 80% of the entire population. Based on the presence of such a large percent of students being included, the sample was representative of the entire population.

Certain students were moved each year by parents or by the school. The category of nonlooping students is comprised of students that either transferred in from other schools or those that moved from team to team. At the end of each year, parents were given the option of allowing their child to stay on the same team or move. In some cases, the school moved certain students. One example of this took place during the first year of the loop when numbers were too low. An entire team was dissolved and the students were placed on the other four teams. New students that transfer in during the eighth grade year were also unable to experience looping.

Instrumentation and Materials

Survey responses and standardized test results from the 2007 Georgia CRCT and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment serve as the instrumentation and materials for this quantitative study. The three-part questionnaire was designed by school personnel for internal purposes and administered to eighth grade students at the close of the 2007 school year. Part 1 consisted of one question that identified the degree of looping participation of each study participant. Students identified as having looped for 2 to 3

years were instructed to complete Part 2. Part 2 of the questionnaire consisted of nine closed-ended questions, which focused on the social aspects of their looping experience. All students were instructed to complete Part 3 of the questionnaire, which consisted of two questions. The purpose of these questions was to identify the reasons, if applicable, that students were moved from one team to another and to discover the disciplinary history of each student.

Certain considerations were addressed by the researcher in making the decision to reexamine the data from the 2007 survey in conjunction with standardized testing data. Although the survey was administered in alignment to the existing curriculum at this Georgia middle school with the purpose of improving instruction, the results of the surveys were never disclosed to stakeholders. Grant et al. (1996) also pointed out the importance of measuring the impact of looping from the students' perspective and not just that of parents. As a result, the responses to this survey were studied concurrently with standardized testing data in order to ascertain the complete effect of the looping design on students at this Georgia middle school.

Reliability and Validity

Creswell (2003) described the importance of content validity of survey instruments. When creating the survey instrument used in this study, school personnel made each questionnaire item concise and simple, modeled from a survey used at Liberty Center Elementary which was cited by Grant et al. (1996). The Liberty Center Elementary survey contained general questions about the program as well as questions which addressed academic and social components of the program. The three answer

choices for each question were *agree*, *neutral*, and *disagree*. Three answer choices were given for each question. Part 2 of the questionnaire used in this study consisted of the same areas of inquiry and were phrased in a manner that offered similar answer choices: (a) yes, (b) no, and (c) don't know.

Creswell (2003) also identified pilot testing as an effective method of establishing content validity of a survey. A pilot study of the questionnaire used in this research study was conducted prior to its administration. In order to maintain the integrity of the pilot study and ensure that the participants were representative of the entire population, various subgroups of students were intentionally included. Five male and 5 female students ranging from a 4th grade to a 12th grade reading level were chosen from among the population to pilot the questionnaire. The group consisted of 4 Black students, 4 White students, and 2 Hispanic students. One of the students was identified as having a learning disability and received special education services, one student was gifted, and one student was classified as English language learner (ELL). These participants answered the questions and made notes of any questions or terminology that was difficult to understand. As a result, some wording was changed to make the questions more easily understood. Since several questions were skipped by students during the pilot test, it was necessary to add an answer Choice C (*don't know*) for the questions in Part 2 of the survey.

Student scores from Georgia CRCT were also used in this research study. In a newsletter issued by Georgia Department of Education (n.d.), the reliability and validity of the Georgia CRCT were addressed. According to this publication, CRCT content items are written by highly qualified, professional assessment specialists. The items are

then placed in an operational test to be field tested. A separate committee of educators then reviews the field-tested items taking into consideration how different groups of students responded to each item. This allows the committee to identify potential biases. The committee has the authority to accept, revise, or reject field test items. Once items are accepted, they are added to the test bank to be included and scored in operational tests. Since several tests are available for each grade level, the tests are statistically equated to ensure that all students are held to the same standard. All of these activities are performed by the Georgia Department of Education and the assessment contractor to guarantee that the test serves as an accurate measure of academic achievement for Georgia students.

Similar measures are also taken with the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment. Students are given a prompt and expected to meet the standards of that genre. The Georgia Department of Education (n.d) affirmed that analytic scoring is used to assess four domains: ideas, organization, style, and conventions. Each paper is scored by two raters and equal weight is given to each scorer for all four domains. The domain and total scores offer detailed information on the performance levels of each student.

Data Collection

Data collection began after approval of the IRB at Walden University (02-06-09-0314024). A meeting was conducted with the curriculum director and principal of the participating school. The researcher retrieved student surveys and relevant testing data from school personnel to be analyzed and interpreted.

The personal identity and responses of each student remained strictly confidential. In order to maintain confidentiality of responses and standardized test results, the researcher used a random numbering system to replace the identities of participants. Gender was also recorded for each participant.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the collected data. Data used in the statistical analysis of this study were drawn from survey responses and performance on the Georgia CRCT and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The researcher input the responses from each questionnaire into the SPSS software. Each student was numbered, and the ordinal numbers 1, 2, and 3 were assigned to represent the participants' responses to each answer for Questions 1 through 12. Performance on the Georgia CRCT and the Georgia Writing Assessment were input using the same numbers where 1 represented *not meeting the standard*, 2 represented *meeting the standard*, and 3 represented *exceeding the standard*. Male participants were identified as 1, and female participants were identified as 2. Students' raw scores from the Georgia CRCT and Writing Assessment were also input for the purpose of further quantitative analysis.

Quantitative methods utilized in this study consisted of descriptive statistics including frequency tables, nonparametric measures (crosstabs and chi-square tests), and parametric measures (ANOVA). For Research Questions 1 and 2, specific survey questions were analyzed and cross-tabulated by looping participation (independent variable). For Research Question 1, the researcher organized the data by gender and team

affiliation in order to aid with understanding and check for data patterns. Chi-square was then performed to test the significance level of looping participation as it relates to student perceptions of both social experiences and student behavior. For the third research question, standardized test results in the form of standard mastery level and mean comparisons were analyzed based on the degree of looping participation and gender. The ANOVA one-way test for variance was then conducted to determine if a correlation exists between looping and standardized test performance.

Summary

Section 3 describes the research design, the population, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis. The researcher examined the impact of looping on the social and academic experiences of middle school students by utilizing quantitative methods to analyze standardized test scores and student surveys. The nature of the survey instrument and the standardized test scores increased the reliability and validity of the study. The results are presented in section 4.

SECTION 4: RESULTS

Introduction

In this section, the findings are presented. The purpose of this study was to determine if social and academic benefits exist for students participating in a looping program at a Georgia middle school. Survey responses and standardized testing data of looping and nonlooping students were compared.

Research Question #1

What is the impact of participation in a looping program on the social experiences perceived by eighth grade students?

Positive Experiences

In order to determine if the students perceived positive social experiences or benefits of looping, Questions 2, 3, 5, and 10 from the survey were analyzed. A decision was made to categorize the responses to these survey items by team and gender. The purpose of this classification was to test any differences in the perceptions of students based on gender and their team affiliation. The findings for Question 2 are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

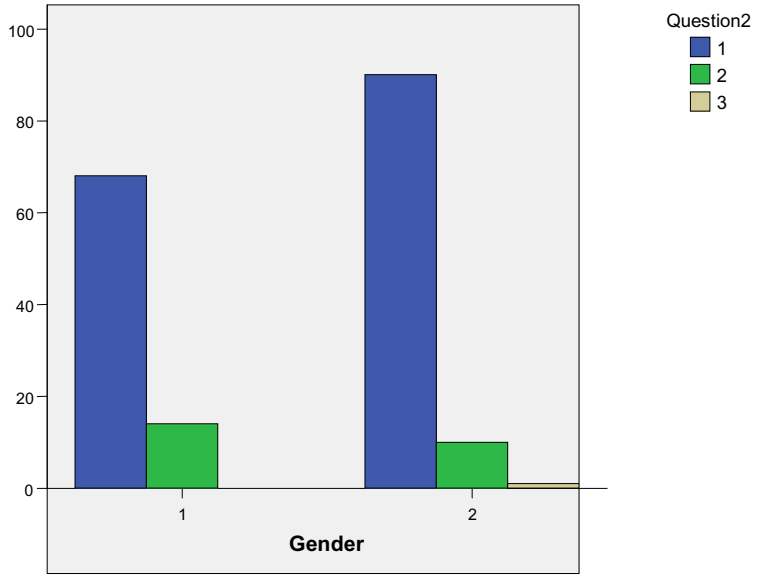

Figure 1.

Feeling of comfort created through looping by gender.

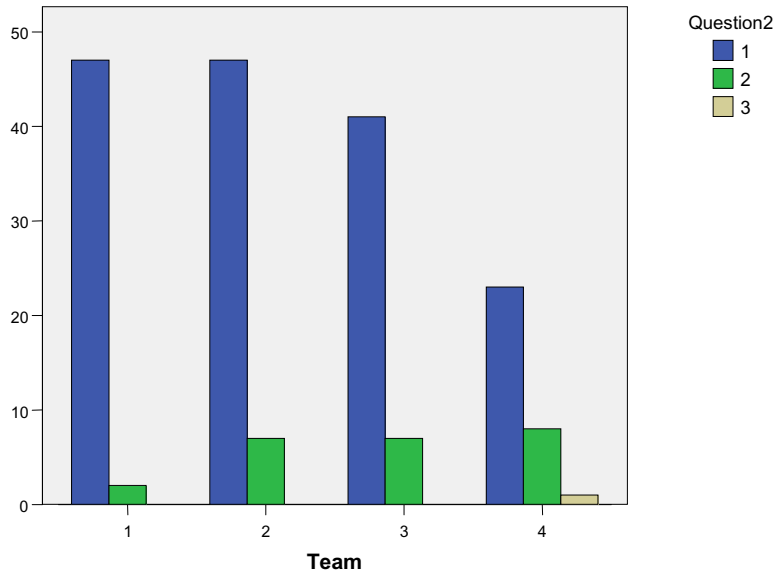

Figure 2.

Feeling of comfort created through looping by team.

The response to Question 2 of the survey supported that students that had looped for 2 or 3 years experienced a more comfortable feeling with school in general. Of 183 students who had looped for 2 to 3 years, 158 students selected Choice 1, acknowledging that they felt more comfortable with school. This represented 86.3% of the looping participants. Females (Choice 2) were more likely to select choice one, but only by a narrow margin (see Figure 1). Fewer students from Team 1 felt that looping did not enhance the comfort level of school in general compared to the other three teams (see Figure 2). Overall, however, the responses support that the presence of looping does lead to an increased comfort level for students.

Looping participants were also asked if they liked staying with the same group of students for more than 1 year. These results are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

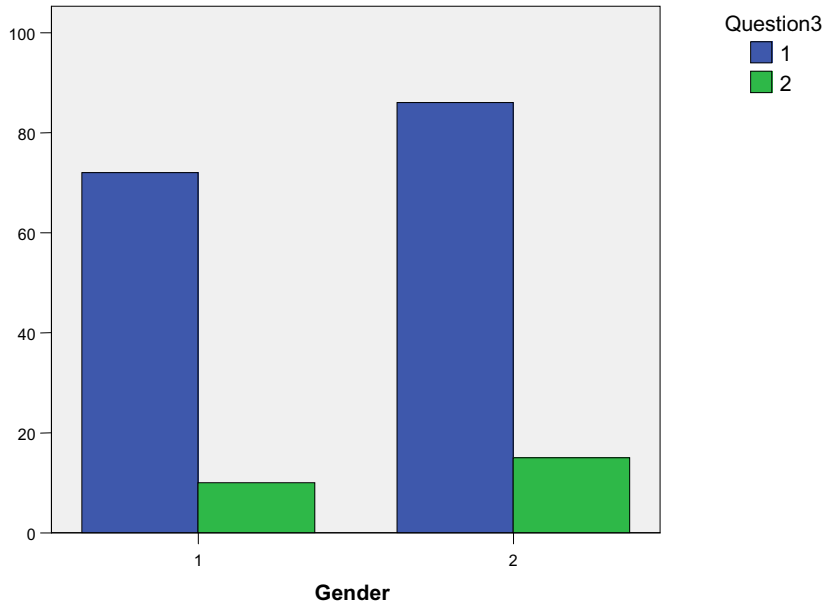

Figure 3.

Preferences of student grouping by gender.

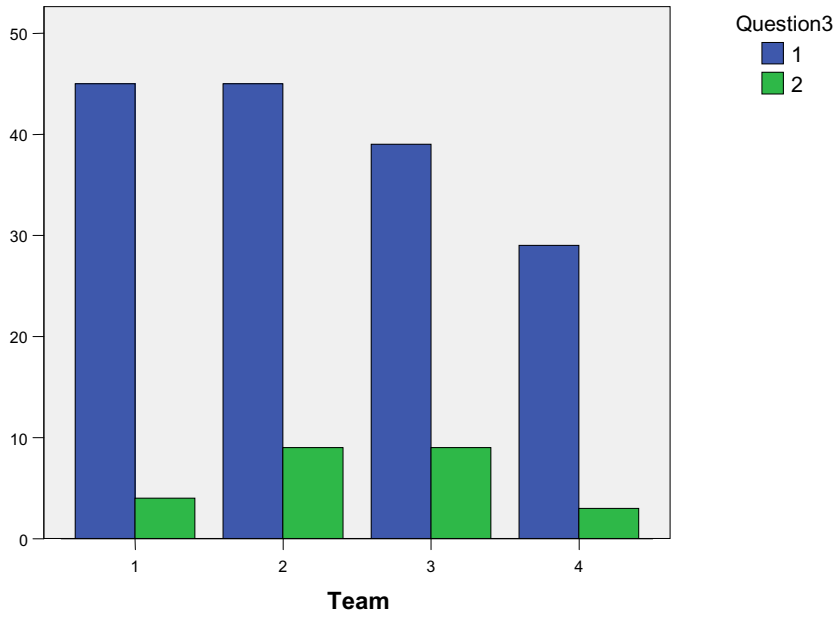

Figure 4.

Preferences of student grouping by team.

Looping participants responded definitively regarding their approval of staying with the same group of students during the loop. The responses of male and female participants to Question 3 offered nearly identical results to that of Question 2 (see Figure 3). Nearly 88% of male participants and 85% of female participants selected Choice 1 meaning that they preferred staying with the same group of students for more than 1 year. Team 1 has fewer students that did not like staying with the same group of students (see Figure 4). Again, however, a high percentage of participants supported this social benefit of looping.

Question 5 probed a bit deeper into the students' loyalty to their teams. It allowed students to choose if they would have preferred to be on a different team each year if they had the ability to go back in time. This question allowed the students to take into consideration all aspects of the team, not just fellow students (see Figures 5 and 6).

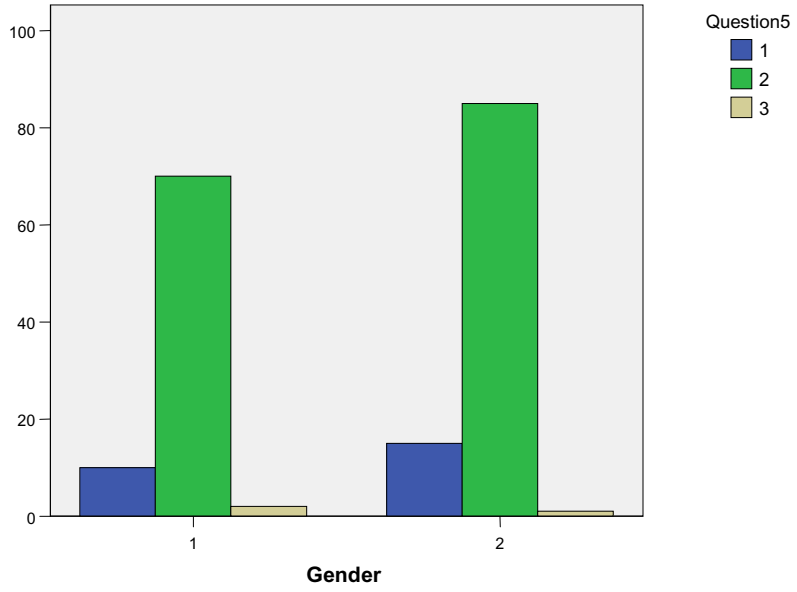

Figure 5.

Preference of changing teams each year by gender.

For this question, Choice 1 constituted that students would prefer to have changed to a new team each year, Choice 2 that they would not have preferred to change, and choice three was indecisive. Eighty-five of 101 females answered that they would not have preferred to be on a different team each year, while 70 of 82 males concurred. This

represents 84.1% of females and 85.3% of males that would not have changed this aspect of their looping experience. In all, 25 students would have chosen to change teams, and 3 were indecisive.

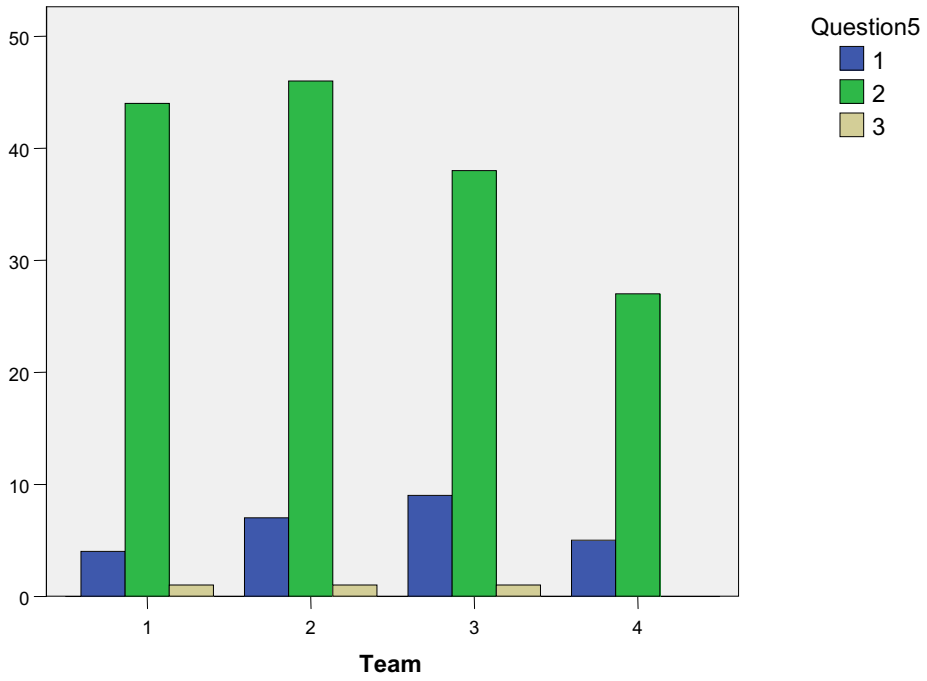

Figure 6.

Preference of changing teams each year by team.

Team 1, again, shows the lowest number of students with negative responses (see Figure 6). Teams 3 and 4 had the largest percentage of students choose that they would have liked to change each year. These percentages were 18.7% and 15.6%, respectively.

The final survey question dealing with social benefits perceived by the participants was Question 10. It asked if the students felt that their relationships with friends and teachers were better because of looping. Putting all other considerations aside, students were asked to respond to the influence of the looping design on the promotion of student to student and student to teacher relationships (see Figures 7 and 8).

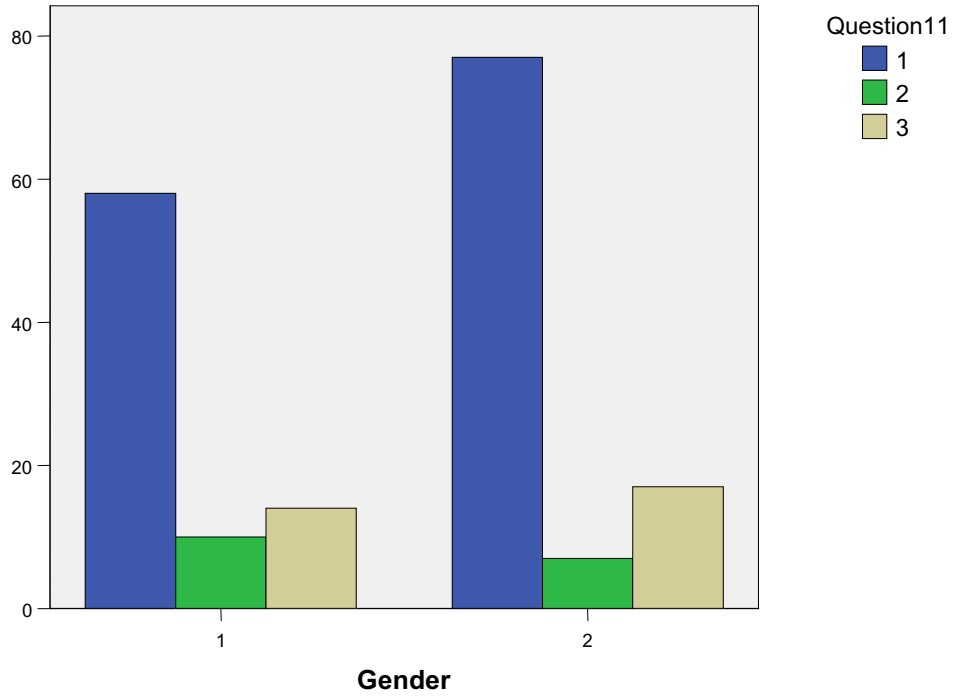

Figure 7.

Influence of looping design on relationships by gender.

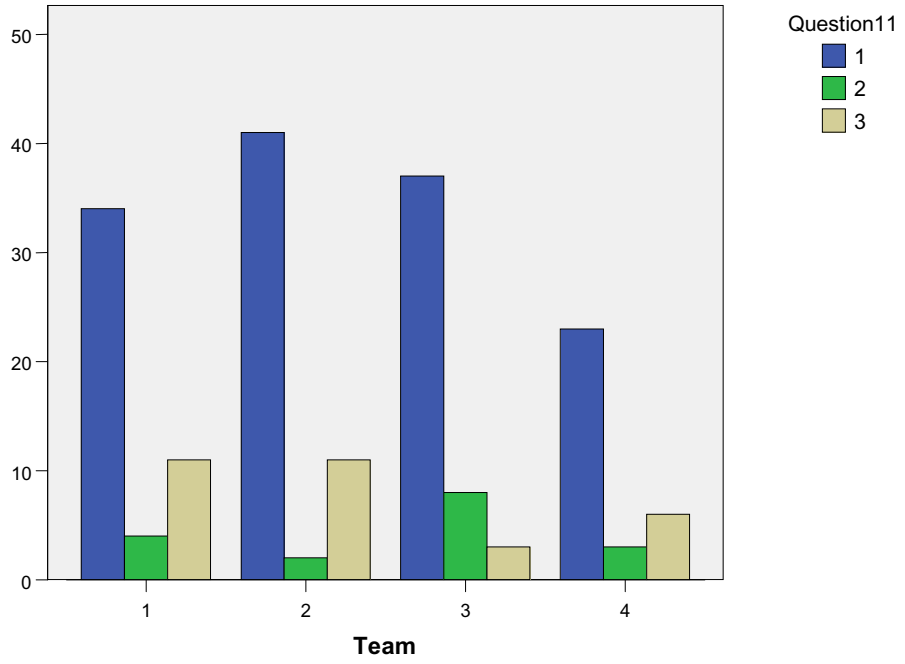

Figure 8.

Influence of looping design on relationships by team.

One hundred thirty-five students (73.8%) responded that their relationships with students and teachers were better because of looping, while 17 responded to the contrary. Nearly half of the 17 students that responded negatively came from Team 3. Thirty-one students also chose the third option (*don't know*) for this question. Twenty-two of these responses came from Teams 1 and 2. Although this was still a relatively low percentage compared to the entire group of participants, it does present an area of further consideration. In order to explain these 31 cases of indecision in regard to Question 10, a

cross tabulation was made which correlated the responses to question 10 and the number of discipline referrals of these students. By focusing on the frequency of discipline referrals, the researcher sought to determine if students with higher frequencies of discipline referrals made up a larger percentage of the students that answered no or don't know for this question. Data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Relationships' Perception Based on Number Discipline Referrals

		Question 10 – Do you feel your relationships with friends and teachers were better because of looping?			
		1 - Yes	2 - No	3 – Don't Know	Total
Question 12 - Over the past year, approximately how many times were you written up for discipline?	1 – None	70	8	14	92
	2 – 1 to 2 times	37	3	10	50
	3 – more than 2 times	28	6	7	41
Total		135	17	31	183

In Table 1, 31 students that were indecisive as to whether looping led to better relationships with friends and teachers. Fourteen of these were responses from students that had zero referrals in the present year. Ten of the indecisive responses came from students with 1 to 2 referrals, and only seven came from students with more than 2 referrals. Even more interesting was the number of students with no discipline referrals who felt looping did not lead to better relationships with friends and teachers. Almost half of the 17 students that did not believe that their relationships with students and teachers were better because of looping had zero referrals during the year. Based on this data, discipline did not have a substantial influence on student perceptions of student to student and student to teacher relationships built through looping.

Negative Experiences

In addition to the survey items which focused on social benefits, it was necessary to include questions that helped determine if specific challenges existed in the experiences of these participants that research commonly identifies as social disadvantages of looping. Questions 4, 6, 7, and 8 focused on the treatment of new students to the team, formation of cliques, and missed experiences due to looping. These questions were analyzed by team. Not only are the overall responses important in analyzing the challenges, but equally vital is the need to analyze these items by team to determine any inconsistencies that may exist.

Question 4 addressed the arrival of new students to the teams and if it was hard for them to fit in. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

New Students Fitting In on Looping Teams

		Question 4 – When new students were placed on your team, was it harder for them to fit in?			
		1 - Yes	2 - No	3 – Don't Know	Total
Team	1	19	30	0	49
	2	19	35	0	54
	3	19	28	1	48
	4	9	22	1	32
Total		66	115	2	183

Table 2 reveals that 115 students selected Choice 2, meaning that they did not find it harder for new students to fit in. This represents 62.8% of the looping participants. Teams 1, 2, and 3 each had 19 students respond that it was harder for new students to fit in. The largest percentage of students who felt it was harder for new students to fit in came from Team 3 (39.5%), while Teams 1 and 2 were close behind with 38.7% and

35.2%, respectively. Team 4 had the lowest percentage of students (28.1%) that felt it was more difficult for new students to fit in on the looping team. Participants were also asked if they felt that they missed out on having new teachers, new experiences, and/or new friends because of looping. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Perception of Missing Out

		Question 6 – Do you feel you missed out on having new teachers, new experiences, and/or new friends because of looping?			
		1 - Yes	2 - No	3 – Don't Know	Total
Team	1	10	39	0	49
	2	14	40	0	54
	3	9	38	1	48
	4	9	21	2	32
Total		42	138	3	183

As shown in Table 3, 138 of the 183 participants (75.4%) felt that they had not missed out on having new teachers, experiences, and friends due to looping. Team 4 showed the largest percentage of participants that felt they had missed out with 28.1%, and Team 2 was not far behind with 25.9%.

Survey Questions 7 and 8 addressed the formation of cliques. Question 7 asked if the participant thought that cliques were formed as the result of looping. Question 8 followed up by asking if the participant felt that cliques could be formed on teams that do not loop. Tables 4 and 5 show the responses.

Table 4

Formation of Cliques on Looping Teams

		Question 7 – Do you think cliques were formed because of the looping program?			
		1 - Yes	2 - No	3 – Don't Know	Total
Team	1	35	14	0	49
	2	20	34	0	54
	3	36	12	0	48
	4	25	4	3	32
Total		116	64	3	183

As shown in Table 4, participants felt, almost 2 to 1, that cliques were formed because of the looping program. Teams 1, 3, and 4 differed greatly than Team 2. On Team 2 alone, a greater number of students felt that cliques had not formed because of looping.

Table 5

Formation of Cliques on Nonlooping Teams

		Question 8 – Do you think "cliques" are formed on teams that do not loop?			
		1 - Yes	2 - No	3 – Don't Know	Total
Team	1	34	8	7	49
	2	18	10	26	54
	3	29	8	11	48
	4	24	2	6	32
Total		105	28	50	183

Table 5 shows that most of the participants feel that cliques could be formed on nonlooping teams, as well. Fifty students also selected Choice 3 which identified them as being unsure if cliques could be formed on nonlooping teams. Over half of these responses came from students on Team 2.

Chi-square tests were performed and results are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6

Chi-Square Test of Student Preferences

		Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual	*Chi-square*	*p* value
Feeling of Comfort	1 - Yes	158	61	97	235.705	0.000
	2 - No	24	61	-37		
	3 - Don't know	1	61	-60		
Student Grouping	1 - Yes	158	91.5	66.5	96.661	0.000
	2 - No	25	91.5	-66.5		
	3 - Don't know	0	0	0		
Changing Teams	1 - Yes	25	61	-36	221.246	0.000
	2 - No	155	61	94		
	3 - Don't know	3	61	-58		
Building of Relationships	1 - Yes	116	61	55	97.41	0.000
	2 - No	60	61	-1		
	3 - Don't know	7	61	-54		

Table 7

Chi-Square Test of Student Perceptions

		Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual	*Chi-square*	*p* value
New Students Fitting In	1 - Yes	66	61.0000	5.000	105.279	0.000
	2 - No	115	61.0000	54.000		
	3 - Don't know	2	61.0000	-59.000		
Missing Out	1 - Yes	95	61.0000	34.000	45.770	0.000
	2 - No	21	61.0000	-40.000		
	3 - Don't know	67	61.0000	6.000		
Formation of Cliques on Looping Teams	1 - Yes	42	61.0000	-19.000	158.262	0.000
	2 - No	138	61.0000	77.000		
	3 - Don't know	3	61.0000	-58.000		
Formation of Cliques on Nonlooping Teams	1 - Yes	116	61.0000	55.000	104.885	0.000
	2 - No	64	61.0000	3.000		
	3 - Don't know	3	61.0000	-58.000		

The low significance level ($p = 0.000$) for all areas of preference and perception reveals that participation in looping does have a significant impact on the social experiences perceived by students. Since p (0.000) < .05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Research Question #2

What is the impact of participation in a looping program on student conduct?

In measuring student conduct, it was necessary to test student perceptions of student conduct along with the frequency of discipline referrals of looping and nonlooping students. In order to reject the null hypothesis, the analysis of student perceptions of behavior would show that looping students behave better than nonlooping students. In addition, the number of discipline referrals for nonlooping students should be significantly higher than that of looping students.

Student Conduct

Question 9 of the survey addressed whether or not the students perceived that students behave better if they stay with the same teachers for more than 1 year. Figure 9 provides the percentages of participants' responses to this question.

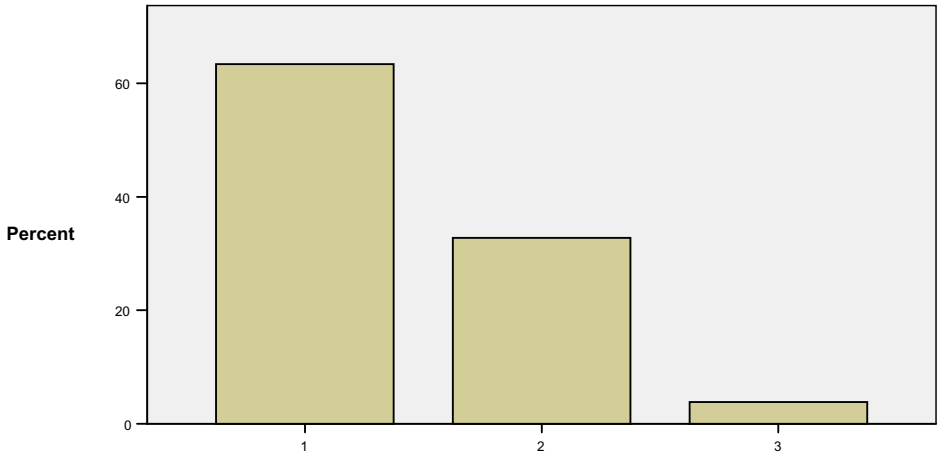

Figure 9

Perceptions of student behavior.

Sixty-three percent of the looping students selected choice one and agreed that students behave better if they have the opportunity to stay with the same teachers for more than one year (see Figure 9). The 32.8% of students that selected Choice 2 did not feel that looping led to better behaved students. Less than 4% of the students were unsure.

Discipline Referrals

Survey Question 12 addressed the number of times each student was referred to the office for discipline during their eighth grade year. Choice 1 was zero referrals, Choice 2 was 1 to 2 referrals, and choice three was more than 2 referrals. Although this

does not identify every discipline infraction made by each student, it does offer insight into the frequency of serious offenses that require office referral. Table 8 displays the relationship between looping participation and frequency of office referrals.

Table 8

Discipline Referrals by Looping Participation

		Question 12 – Over the past year, approximately how many times were you written up for discipline?			
		1 0 times	2 1 - 2 times	3 more than 2	Total
Looping Part	1- No Loop	29	15	13	57
	2 - Looped 2 yrs	24	13	13	50
	3 - Looped 3 yrs	68	37	28	133
Total		121	65	54	240

As identified in Table 8, 121 of the 240 8th grade students had never been referred to the office for discipline. This represents 50.4% of the participants. Approximately 50% of the students that had not looped (LoopingPart 1) and 48% of the students that looped for two years (LoopingPart 2) selected the choice for zero referrals for question 14. For all three levels of looping participation, the percentage of students that selected choice two, 1 to 2 referrals, was within 2 percentage points, nearly identical. The responses of students that were referred to the office for discipline more than two times for Looping Participation groups 1, 2, and 3 were 22.8%, 26%, and 21%, respectively.

Chi-square analysis was utilized to test whether or not the presence of looping has a significant impact on student behavior. Chi-square tests were performed on student perceptions and frequency of discipline referrals. The results are shown in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9

Chi-square Test of Behavior Perceptions

		Observed *N*	Expected *N*	Residual	*Chi-square*	*p* value
Student Behavior	1 - Yes	105.000	61.000	44.000	51.574	0.000
	2 - No	28.000	61.000	-33.000		
	3 - Don't know	50.000	61.000	-11.000		

Table 10

Chi-square Test of Number of Discipline Referrals

	Value	*df*	*p* value
Pearson Chi-Square	0.533	4	0.970
Likelihood Ratio	0.523	4	0.971
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.071	1	0.789
N of Valid Cases	240		

Table 9 clearly demonstrates that students perceive that behavior is better on looping teams. The considerably low level of significance points to a rejection of the null hypothesis. However, Table 10 offers more data to dispute the perceptions of students with regard to student behavior. Since p (.970) > .05, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Research Question #3

What is the correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students?

At all levels in the education process, standardized tests scores serve as the driving force behind best practices and curriculum change. For this research question, the standardized test scores for looping and nonlooping students were studied. Performances from the Georgia CRCT in Reading and Math in addition to results from the Georgia Writing Assessment were analyzed. Directly following the administration of the student surveys, testing data from the current year was coded on each survey by the lead teacher of each team. For CRCT Reading, CRCT Math, and GA Writing, a one, two, or three was selected to identify the performance of that student on each test. Choice one represented that the student did not meet the standard, choice two represented meeting the standard, and choice three represented exceeding the standard. This information is cross tabulated in Tables 11, 12, and 13 to show the correlation between looping participation and student mastery of performance standards as measured by the Georgia CRCT.

Reading Standard Mastery

Table 11 presents the results from the CRCT Reading test standard mastery categorized by looping participation.

Table 11

CRCT Reading Standard Mastery by Looping Participation

		CrctRead			
		1 – Did not meet Standard	2 – Met Standard	3 – Exceeded the Standard	Total
LoopingPart	1- No Loop	14	38	5	57
	2 -Looped 2 yrs	2	44	4	50
	3 -Looped 3 yrs	13	98	22	133
Total		29	180	31	240

As shown in Table 11, students that looped for 2 (LoopingPart 2) or 3 years (LoopingPart 3) performed much better than those that had not looped (LoopingPart 1). Two year looping students possessed the greatest percentage of students meeting and exceeding the standard for this section of the CRCT with 96%. Three year looping students boasted 90.2% of students meeting and exceeding the standard. Students that had not participated in looping, however, did not fare so well. Only 75.4% of these students met or exceeded the standard in Reading. The group of students that looped all three years contained the largest percentage of students that exceeded the standard with 16.5%. This represents a considerably larger percentage than that of the other two groups. Only 8% of two year looping students and 8.8% of nonlooping students exceeded the standard in Reading.

Math Standard Mastery

Table 12 presents the results from the CRCT Math test categorized by looping participation.

Table 12

CRCT Math Standard Mastery by Looping Participation

		CrctMath			
		1 – Did not meet Standard	2 – Met Standard	3 – Exceeded the Standard	Total
LoopingPart	1- No Loop	14	32	11	57
	2 -Looped 2 yrs	7	31	12	50
	3 -Looped 3 yrs	15	66	52	133
Total		36	129	75	240

The results for the Math section of the CRCT were very similar to that of Reading in that looping students outperformed their nonlooping counterparts. Eighty-six percent of students that looped for 2 years met or exceeded the standard in Math, while 88.7% of students that looped all 3 years met or exceeded the standard. In contrast, only 75.4% of nonlooping students met or exceeded the standard in this area. The largest percentage of students exceeding the standard in Math came from the group that looped for three years. Nearly 40% of these students exceeded the standard as opposed to 24% of students that looped for 2 years, and 19.2% of students that had not looped. Therefore, students that looped for 2 to 3 years performed significantly better than nonlooping students.

Writing Standard Mastery

Table 13 presents the results from the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment categorized by looping participation.

Table 13

Georgia Writing Assessment Standard Mastery by Looping Participation

		WritingAssess			
		1 – Did not meet Standard	2 – Met Standard	3 – Exceeded the Standard	Total
LoopingPart	1- No Loop	22	35	0	57
	2 -Looped 2 yrs	17	33	0	50
	3 -Looped 3 yrs	32	98	3	133
Total		71	166	3	240

Table 13 reveals that the gap of performance on the 8th Grade Writing Assessment was much narrower than that of the CRCT. The largest percentage of students to meet the standard was the students that had looped for three years with 73.6%. Sixty-six percent of 2-year looping students met the standard, while 61.4% of nonlooping students met the standard. Only 3 participants in the study exceeded the standard in Writing. All three of these students looped for three years.

Raw scores from the Georgia CRCT and Writing Assessment were also analyzed using the SPSS software. The following tables provide comparative data of the mean and standard deviation of standardized test results categorized by looping participation and gender.

Table 14

Reading Achievement Descriptive Statistics

LoopingPart	Gender	*M*	*N*	*SD*
1- No Loop	1 Male	816.64	33	20.919
	2 Fem	817.92	24	26.745
	Total	817.18	57	23.329
2 -Looped 2 yrs	1 Male	826.89	19	16.003
	2 Fem	821.19	31	17.562
	Total	823.36	50	17.051
3 = Looped 3 yrs	1 Male	829.68	63	25.463
	2 Fem	827.76	70	20.697
	Total	828.67	133	23.008
Total	1 Male	825.48	115	23.423
	2 Fem	824.24	125	21.510
	Total	824.83	240	22.408

Table 14 reveals the differences in mean scores for looping and non looping students on the reading portion of the Georgia CRCT. The data show that the mean score in the area of reading for nonlooping students is considerably lower than that of two year and three year looping students. The mean score for two year looping students was 6.18 points higher than that of nonlooping students. The mean score of three year looping students was 5.31 points greater than two year looping students and 11.49 points greater than nonlooping students. The standard deviation of nonlooping students also served as the largest standard deviation of any of the groups. Therefore the variability of scores was much greater for nonlooping students than any others. Very little difference was noticed between male and female students from each category of looping participation.

Table 15

Math Achievement Descriptive Statistics

LoopingPart	Gender	*M*	*N*	*SD*
1- No Loop	1 Male	312.79	33	27.925
	2 Fem	318.04	24	28.069
	Total	315.00	57	27.857
2 -Looped 2 yrs	1 Male	332.95	19	29.264
	2 Fem	320.32	31	28.475
	Total	325.12	50	29.143
3 = Looped 3 yrs	1 Male	339.76	63	35.488
	2 Fem	337.16	70	32.921
	Total	338.39	133	34.055
Total	1 Male	330.90	115	34.323
	2 Fem	329.31	125	32.014
	Total	330.07	240	33.081

Tables 15 shows the differences in mean scores for looping and non looping students on the math section of the Georgia CRCT. Nonlooping students, again, possessed the lowest average score of 315. Students looping for two years had a mean score of 325.12, while three year looping students achieved the highest mean score of 338.39.

Table 16

Writing Achievement Descriptive Statistics

LoopingPart	Gender	*M*	*N*	*SD*
1- No Loop	1 Male	189.06	33	27.007
	2 Fem	202.75	24	24.442
	Total	194.82	57	26.620
2 -Looped 2 yrs	1 Male	207.58	19	19.763
	2 Fem	208.48	31	16.951
	Total	208.14	50	17.877
3 = Looped 3 yrs	1 Male	203.70	63	29.189
	2 Fem	212.40	70	22.505
	Total	208.28	133	26.152
Total	1 Male	200.14	115	27.956
	2 Fem	209.58	125	21.817
	Total	205.05	240	25.339

Table 16 displays the differences in mean scores for the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment. Mean scores of nonlooping students was approximately 13 points lower than that of two and three year looping students. Scores of nonlooping male students fell in the nonpassing range. In addition to the lowest scores, nonlooping students also carried the largest standard deviation from the mean. The highest average scores were achieved by female students that had looped for 3 years.

ANOVA was conducted to analyze the data for Research Question 3. This analysis of variance was done to assess the mean differences between the standardized test scores (dependent variable) and looping participation (independent variable). ANOVA is a statistical test which compares the amount of variance between groups of individual scores with the amount of variance within the groups. The results are provided in Table 17.

Table 17

One Way ANOVA of Standardized Test Performance

		Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p* value
CrctRead	Between Groups	5408.124	2	2704.062	5.592	0.004
	Within Groups	114603.209	237	483.558		
	Total	120011.333	239			
CrctMath	Between Groups	23378.847	2	11689.423	11.632	0.000
	Within Groups	238164.949	237	1004.915		
	Total	261543.796	239			
WritingAssess	Between Groups	7823.323	2	3911.662	6.366	0.002
	Within Groups	145624.972	237	614.451		
	Total	153448.296	239			

The purpose of using analysis of variance is to compare the between group variance to the within group variance. If the interaction between each group creates a much larger variance than the interaction within each group, then the means of the groups are different. Table 17 clearly demonstrates that the mean squares or variances are much greater between groups than within groups. Although the *F* value which denotes the ratio of the two variances was the greatest in the area of math, the areas of reading and writing also reveal substantial differences.

The *p* value represents the probability that the null hypothesis is actually correct. A smaller *p* value means that there is more evidence to reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no correlation between academic achievement on standardized tests and degree of looping participation. The confidence level for this test was set at 5% (.05). Since the values for *p* (.004, .000, .002) < .05 for all areas of measure, the result of

this statistical analysis yielded that a significant difference does exist in the standardized test results of looping and nonlooping students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Summary

Section 4 included an analysis of data which was guided by the research questions and hypotheses in this study. Quantitative findings illustrate the impact of looping on the social and academic experiences of middle school eighth grade students. Analysis of standardized test scores and responses to student surveys offered evidence that the presence of looping at the middle school level leads to positive student outcomes. Recommendations for future research and implications for social change are discussed in section 5.

SECTION 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Georgia school districts have been concerned with the social and academic benefits of looping middle school students. Research-based findings are necessary in order for school district administrators to determine the effectiveness of the looping design on middle school students. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of looping on the social and academic experiences of students at a Georgia middle school. The goal of this study was to provide decision makers with solid evidence concerning the effect of looping on students' social experiences, conduct, and achievement on standardized tests.

The population included 240 eighth grade students with varying degrees of looping participation. Surveys were administered to students in order to ascertain demographic information, perceptions of the looping experience, and number of office discipline referrals. These surveys were then coded to reflect the Georgia CRCT and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessment scores for each participant. Variables were analyzed and in some cases cross tabulated for each research question in order to make comparisons by looping participation, gender, and team affiliation. Chi-square and ANOVA tests were performed to test for significant differences and variance. This section discusses and reviews the findings for each of the research questions used to guide this study.

Research Questions and Conclusions

This study was guided by three research questions. The three questions and hypotheses are as follows:

1. What is the impact of participation in a looping program on the social experiences perceived by eighth grade students?

   H_o: There is no significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on perceived social experiences.

   H_1: There is a significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on perceived social experiences.

2. What is the impact of participation in a looping program on student conduct?

   H_o: There is no significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the nonlooping situation on student conduct.

   H_1: There is a significant difference between students in the looping situation and students in the non-looping situation on student conduct.

3. What is the correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students?

   H_o: There is no correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students.

   H_1: There is a correlation in reading, writing, and math achievement on standardized tests for looping and nonlooping students.

Discussion of Research Question 1

The first research question focused on the impact of looping on the social experiences of looping students. To address this aspect of the research, responses to four survey items were analyzed and cross-tabulated by the degree looping participation and gender in order to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions. For all four questions, students responded in support of the looping design, and 86.3% of looping students felt that looping did create an increased level of comfort for students. When asked if they liked staying with the same group of students for more than one year, 86.3% of looping students responded yes. The third question in this group asked if students would want to change teams each year if they could go back in time. Given the opportunity to go back in time 84.7% of students selected that they would not want to be on a different team each year. Finally, when asked if relationships with friends and teachers were better because of looping, 73.8% of students felt that they had benefited in this regard. Compared to the other questions in this group, however, a larger group of students were indecisive. The researcher hypothesized that this group of students could be comprised of students with more than two discipline referrals in the present year. A cross-tabulation was made, and the data revealed that only 22.5% of the students who were unsure about the existence of better relationships actually had more than two discipline referrals. These findings suggested that the frequency of discipline referrals had minimal effect on students' perceptions of positive and/or negative relationships with other looping students and teachers.

The survey items also addressed challenges of looping as experienced by the participants of this study. The survey items used to address this theme dealt with perceptions of missed experiences by looping students, the formation of cliques, and the ability of new students to fit in on the looping team.

Although 62.8% of looping students felt that it was not more difficult for new students to fit in, 36% felt that it was. This percentage suggests that it is highly possible that a substantial number of new students did, in fact, have a difficult time adjusting to their looping team. One possible explanation for this lies in the formation of cliques by looping students. Among looping students, 63.4% believed that the looping design led to the formation of cliques. Almost 35% were not convinced that looping encouraged the formation of cliques. A small percentage was indecisive. When asked if they believed that cliques could be formed on nonlooping teams, the percentage of agreement was slightly lower with 57.3% believing that cliques could be formed. A very small percentage (15.3%) felt that cliques were not formed on nonlooping teams, and 27.3% were unsure. The data support students who are put together for more than one year are more likely to form cliques due to the length of time building relationships with friends. This, likely, makes it more difficult for new students to build similar relationships in shorter periods of time in order to fit into these groups.

The final item addressing this research question sought to determine if the looping students felt that they had missed out on new experiences, friends, and teachers due to their participation in a looping program and 75.4% felt they had not missed out on any new experiences due to looping. Although this seems like a very high percentage, the

reality that 1 out of 4 students did feel that they had missed out on new experiences, friends, and teachers due to looping is a concern.

Chi-square testing on the perceptions of students toward their looping experiences offered positive results in favor of the alternate hypothesis. The low significance level for all areas of perception revealed that participation in looping does have a significant impact on the social experiences perceived by students. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Research Question 2

This research question focused on students' perceptions of student behavior and the effect of looping on the number of office discipline referrals. Based on the responses to Question 10 of the survey, 63.4% of the looping students perceived that students behave better if they have the opportunity to stay with the same teachers for more than 1 year. In contrast, 32.8% did not feel that looping led to better behaved students. Therefore, almost two thirds of the group felt that looping led to better behaved students.

In regard to office discipline referrals, 29 students (50.8%) that had not looped had also not been referred for discipline. The 24 student that had looped for 2 years that had not been referred represented 48% of that group. Likewise, 68 students (51.1%) that had looped all 3 years had never been referred for discipline. Students who were referred 1 to 2 times during the year were represented by 26.3% of nonlooping students, 26% of students that had looped for 2 years, and 27.8% of students that had looped for all three years. The final category of more than two referrals consisted of 22.8% of nonlooping

students, 26% of students that looped for 2 years, and 21.1% of students that looped all 3 years.

The chi-square tests that were performed produced different results. The data regarding student perceptions revealed that students did feel that student behavior was better as a result of looping. The researcher concluded that the level of significance was great enough to determine that the presence of looping had minimal, if any, impact on the number of discipline referrals of students. The data refute the actual perceptions of the majority of looping students who felt that students behaved better on looping teams. For this reason, the researcher did not reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion of Research Question 3

Research question three centered on the academic experiences of study participants. In order to concentrate on this area, performance on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test in Reading and Math and the Georgia 8th Grade Writing Assessments were assigned to each participating student and compared among the groups. Student data consisted of a distribution of students that exceeded, met, or did not meet the standard on the CRCT. The raw scores of each group based on looping participation and gender were also analyzed.

On the Reading section of the Georgia CRCT, 96% of students that looped for 3 years and 90.2% of students that looped for 2 years met or exceeded the standard. These percentages were considerably higher than the 75.4% of nonlooping students that met or exceeded the standard in Reading. In addition, the largest percentage of students exceeding the standard (16.5%) was drawn from the group of 3-year looping students.

The results from the Math section of the CRCT were very similar, where 88.7% of students that looped for 3 years and 86% of students that looped 2 years met or exceeded the standard in Math. A much lower 74.5% of nonlooping students met or exceeded the standard in Math. Almost 70% of the students that exceeded the standard in Math had looped for 3 years.

On the 8th Grade Writing Assessment, 73.6% of 3-year looping students met the standard as opposed to 66% of 2-year looping students and 61% of nonlooping students. In addition, all students who exceeded the standard in Writing participated on looping teams.

The testing data from the Georgia CRCT and the 8th Grade Writing Test convincingly supported the concept of looping. The percentage of students meeting and exceeding the standard in Reading and Math was much greater for looping students than their counterparts. Although the Writing test results did not show much of a gap between nonlooping students and students that looped for 2 years, a substantial difference still existed between nonlooping students and students that had looped for 3 years.

Mean comparisons and the ANOVA one way test for variance revealed that looping students outperformed nonlooping students in the areas of reading, math, and writing on standardized tests. The mean comparisons showed that the level of performance increased based on the number of years that each student looped. The ANOVA test for variance confirmed that a significant difference existed in the standardized test results of looping and nonlooping students. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Conclusion #1

The presence of looping designs at the middle school level can have a positive effect on the social outcomes of looping students. Remaining with the same team for two to three years helps students to feel more comfortable with school and allows for a more personal and meaningful bonds to be created among students and teachers. This bond promotes a feeling of loyalty and belonging to the looping group which has a positive impact on student confidence and self esteem. Looping enhances the educational experience of middle school students and allows students to have more positive attitudes towards school.

Conclusion #2

A positive correlation exists between participation in a looping program and academic achievement. Students perform much better on standardized tests as the result of being with the same group of teachers for more than one year. Teachers are allowed the benefit of not having to get to know the students at the beginning of the year. By having the previous years' experience with the student, they save time in assessing student levels and student learning styles. Looping teachers are better equipped to maximize instructional time in order to better meet the academic needs of their students.

Conclusion #3

Insufficient data existed to suggest that looping has a positive effect on student behavior. A possible explanation of this conclusion may be the handling of student behavior and discipline by teachers. Classroom management and teacher presentation

techniques are critical aspects that influence student behavior (Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Nelson, 2003). In addition, teachers respond to student behavior, differently. Therefore, this relationship is not easily measured. Based on this study, the researcher concluded that no relationship existed between looping and student behavior.

Relationship to Other Literature

This study provided valuable findings that can be used when examining related literature regarding looping. In this section, the current research is related to other literature.

Studies have shown a direct connection between looping and increased academic achievement. George (2000) showed a favorable correlation between looping and the identification of student academic needs. Since teachers can better assess and address the instructional needs of their students, academic achievement is improved. Fuller (2006); Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1997); and Shultis (2002) also confirmed that student achievement in reading and math are increased due to looping. In addition to increased achievement in reading and writing, the standardized testing data gathered in this study supports the notion that looping also leads to higher achievement in writing. This research further reveals that higher achievement in reading, math, and writing were directly correlated to the number of years of looping participation. The mean average of math scores of 3-year looping students was over 20 points higher than nonlooping students. Two-year looping students boasted a mean score approximately 10 points higher than nonlooping students. The difference in reading scores was over 11 points for 3-year looping students and 6 points for 2-year looping students. Mean writing scores

were approximately 14 points higher for 2- and 3-year looping students. These gaps in achievement reflect the research of Crosby (1998) and Burke (1997) who found that the extra instructional time created during the looping years led to increased academic performance. George and Lounsbury (2000) further attested that teachers are better equipped to identify and address student needs over the longer period of time.

In a study by Fitz, Hofmann, and Sherman (2002), the relationships forged by students on looping teams led to a greater degree of satisfaction with the school. Studies by Bulau (2007) and Kerr (2002) pointed to student connectedness and greater quality of friendships through looping teams, although the study conducted by Bulau also had a parent survey component. The student responses to the surveys in this study confirm that most looping students were, indeed, satisfied with their overall looping experience. Nearly 9 out of 10 students felt that looping led to a greater overall comfort level with school and were satisfied with staying with the same group of students for more than one year. Approximately three-fourths of the students agree with Kerr and Bulau that better relationships with friends and teachers were experienced through looping.

Prior research has also shown a positive effect of looping on student behavior. Nichols (2002) found that looping teachers are more inclined to try alternative behavior management strategies with their students. Grant (2000) also found that looping teachers take a more positive approach to classroom management. The data addressing student behavior in this study show that almost two-thirds of the participants felt that staying with the same teacher led to better student behavior. Gilliam (2005) and Lincoln (1998) offered proof that looping has a positive impact on the number of student discipline referrals. Although students perceived that behavior was better on looping teams, Chi-

square testing confirmed the opposite. The findings clearly show that a larger percentage of looping students was referred to the office for discipline. These findings refute the findings of both Gilliam and Lincoln.

Implications for Social Change

The implementation of the NCLB (2002) has led to increased accountability in our public schools. No other time in history has our educational system been under such scrutiny. With this scrutiny comes increased awareness and sensibility towards our current system of education. Educators are now, more than ever, called upon to question themselves as they search for the best ways to meet the needs of their diverse learners. This study is significant in that it offers a solution to many of the challenges faced in America's middle schools.

As presented in section 4, the looping design utilized at the middle school level allows students the opportunity to create more meaningful relationships with students and teachers. These relationships lead to stronger friendships and a more comfortable feeling of school. The presence of these social benefits of looping allow for a more positive educational experience. The academic benefits of looping also cannot be overlooked. Students who participate in looping programs have consistently shown higher achievement on standardized tests. Subject mastery is also a byproduct of the looping design since more time can be devoted to the instructional needs of students.

The road to implementing looping in America's middle schools is a long one. Educators are fearful of change, and they are not convinced that the benefits of looping cannot be attained in the traditional setting. The findings of this study provide

unequivocal evidence that the looping design is a proven model. School administrators must be called upon to explore the implementation of looping. Every middle school in America should self-assess to determine how the looping design could be best implemented to improve student achievement. A nationwide shift from traditional middle schools to looping middle schools must begin with the implementation of looping on pilot teams in middle schools across the country. Once implemented, it is vital that school personnel put forth a strenuous effort in promoting and maintaining positive looping environments in their schools.

Recommendations for Further Study

The researcher investigated the social and academic benefits of middle school looping. The following are recommendations for further study:

1. The study should be expanded to include demographically similar middle school students participating in a nonlooping program in order to compare academic achievement on standardized tests.
2. The study should be expanded to include responses from parents and teachers regarding the social benefits experienced through looping.
3. Research should be conducted to examine the effects of teacher attrition on the looping experience.
4. The impact of student and teacher choice on the effectiveness of looping teams should be examined.

5. Research should be conducted to determine if participants in middle school looping programs have a more difficult time adjusting to high school than students of traditional models.
6. When researching differences in student behavior and discipline of looping and traditional programs, special consideration should be given to the nature and severity of offenses as well as the root causes of habitual offenders.

Summary

Section 5 presented a discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research. The findings indicate that looping has a significant impact on both social and academic experiences of middle school eighth graders. It was also concluded that the presence of looping did not influence student behavior. This study provides substantial support for widespread implementation of looping at the middle school level.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Brad S. Gregory
January 10, 2007

Principal, Middle School

Dear Principal,

I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program at Walden University. The focus of my research in this program has centered on the concept of middle school looping. I truly appreciate the opportunity that you have given me to touch the lives of my students. It is my goal to take this opportunity a step further by studying our students and creating a lasting contribution in our field.

I would like your permission to analyze completed surveys of eighth grade students which were administered at the end of the 2007 school year in order to determine student perceptions of their looping experience. In addition to the survey, I also need your permission to access standardized tests results from the Georgia CRCT and 8th Grade Writing Assessment. I maintain that the identity of all participants will be protected through the use of random numbering.

I truly believe that the results of this study will offer valuable information regarding the effectiveness of looping at XXXX Middle School and offer insight into the positive aspects of looping, in general. In light of the criticism that we have received due to looping, this study may prove helpful in identifying the benefits of the looping program.

By signing and dating below, you hereby grant permission for Brad S. Gregory to access completed surveys of all eighth grade students and standardized test results for these students. Thanks again for this wonderful opportunity and your cooperation.

Respectfully,

Brad S. Gregory

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX B: STUDENT LOOPING SURVEY

Name_____Team_____

Part 1:

1. What grades have you been a part of your current team at XXXX Middle School?

a. only 8th grade
b. 7th and 8th grades
c. 6th, 7th, and 8th grades

If you answered b or c to the question above, complete part 2 and 3. If you answered a, complete part 3 only.

Part 2:

2. Did looping make you feel more comfortable with school in general?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

3. Did you like staying with the same group of students for more than one year?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

4. When new students were placed on your team, was it harder for them to fit in?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

5. If you could go back in time, would you want to be on a different team each year?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

6. Do you feel you missed out on having new teachers, new experiences, and/or new friends because of looping?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

7. Do you think "cliques" were formed because of the looping program?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

8. Do you think "cliques are formed on teams that do not loop?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

9. Do you think students behave better if they stay with the same teachers for more than one year?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

10. Do you feel that your relationships with friends and teachers were better because of looping?

a. yes
b. no
c. don't know

Part 3:

11. Were you ever moved to a different team at XXXX Middle School?

a. Yes, my parents moved me to a different team.
b. Yes, the school moved me to a different team.
c. No

12. Over the past year, approximately how many times were you written up for discipline?

a. 0
b. 1 or 2 times
c. more than 2 times

CURRICULUM VITAE

Brad Stephen Gregory

Education

Ed.D. July 2009	Walden University
M.A. December 2003	Albany State University
B.A. May 1999	Mercer University

Employment

Elementary and Middle Grades Teacher	2000 - 2007
Elementary Administrator	2007 - present

Certification

P – 12 Administration and Leadership
P – 5 Early Childhood Education
6 –8 Middle Grades Education