
LOOPING

Looping represents a curricular-instructional practice where a group of students remain under the guidance of a teacher for more than the standard

period of time (typically more than a single academic year) while they are promoted to a new grade level. After typically a 2- or 3-year period, students move on to a new teacher(s) and the original (looping) teacher returns to a lower grade level to work with a new group of students. Resting upon the premise that better curricular and instructional practices may be crafted by the teacher who has become familiar with the needs and interests of the students, looping is often used as a way to establish a small school feeling and stability to the educational process. The practice is said to lessen anxiety of students as they begin each new year and to build stronger relations among teachers and parents. Looping was implicit in the structure of education during the late 19th- and early 20th-century one-room school house where only one teacher was available to all students. Historically, the term teacher rotation has also been used to describe this practice.

Although looping's pedigree is not necessarily traced back to the progressive education tradition, such experimentation occurred at the elementary, middle, and secondary school level (especially in core curriculum courses). At times, efforts were made to keep students and a teacher together for more than 1 year, a practice which is common in Waldorf Schools where teachers and students stay together typically from the first through eighth grade. Progressive educators felt that the informed teacher could best craft the curriculum for adolescent youth and to serve as a better way to attend to academic, social, and emotional needs. The Ohio State University School, one of the six most experimental schools of the Eight Year Study (1930–1942), practiced looping at different times throughout Grades 1 through 12; in addition, the impact of looping was incorporated into the education program through the planned participation of the school librarian and arts specialists. An interesting question from some worried parents arose from teacher–student dynamics: What if a teacher and student did not get along? The school administration maintained that an important aspect of building community and establishing democracy as a way of life included resolving conflicts. Teachers believed that an aspect of a realistic learning community involved attending to and working through conflicts and strained personal relations. For this reason, what has later been viewed as a criticism of

looping was viewed as a way to make the educational experience richer and more realistic.

Presently, looping is seen, along with block scheduling, as an effective means of assisting low-achieving student populations. Many positive attributes are assigned to looping, including increased parental involvement and stronger teacher–parent relationships, more extensive instructional time and better curricular design in relation to scope and sequence, increased student attendance and retention, better teacher–pupil planning, and more positive classroom environment. From an educational administrative perspective, it is often noted that looping is an inexpensive educational reform.

The concept of looping has been introduced specifically into the field of curriculum studies by Nel Noddings as she describes the importance of continuity in education. Noddings reintroduces a basic assumption, common among 1930s progressive schools, that the classroom community, similar to a family, is a multipurpose setting. She maintains that a moral educational purpose is to care for children as a way to teach them to care for others and that the relationship of caring is developed over time and calls for educators to implement aspects of continuity into the curricular structure. One specific form is continuity of people, for which Noddings maintains that 3-year looping programs should be commonplace.

With the current trend toward elementary school specialization of subjects among teachers, looping at times is dismissed as academic concerns overshadow the emotional needs-based interests of students. Other disadvantages of looping typically discussed include the possibility of tension between teacher and student or among students and the potential for emotional strain caused by the separation between teacher and student. Yet looping proponents, at both the elementary and middle school level, suggest that more instructional time is gained during the 2nd and 3rd years of looping due to teachers' familiarity with students' interests and needs. Further, the strength of classroom relationships and emotional attachments can serve to reduce truancy.

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See also Caring, Concept of; Eight Year Study, The; Noddings, Nel

Further Readings

- George, P., & Lounsbury, J. (2000). *Making big schools feel small; Multiage group, looping, and schools-within-a-school*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Grant, J., Johnson, B., & Richardson, I. (1997). *The looping handbook: Teachers and students programming together*. Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.