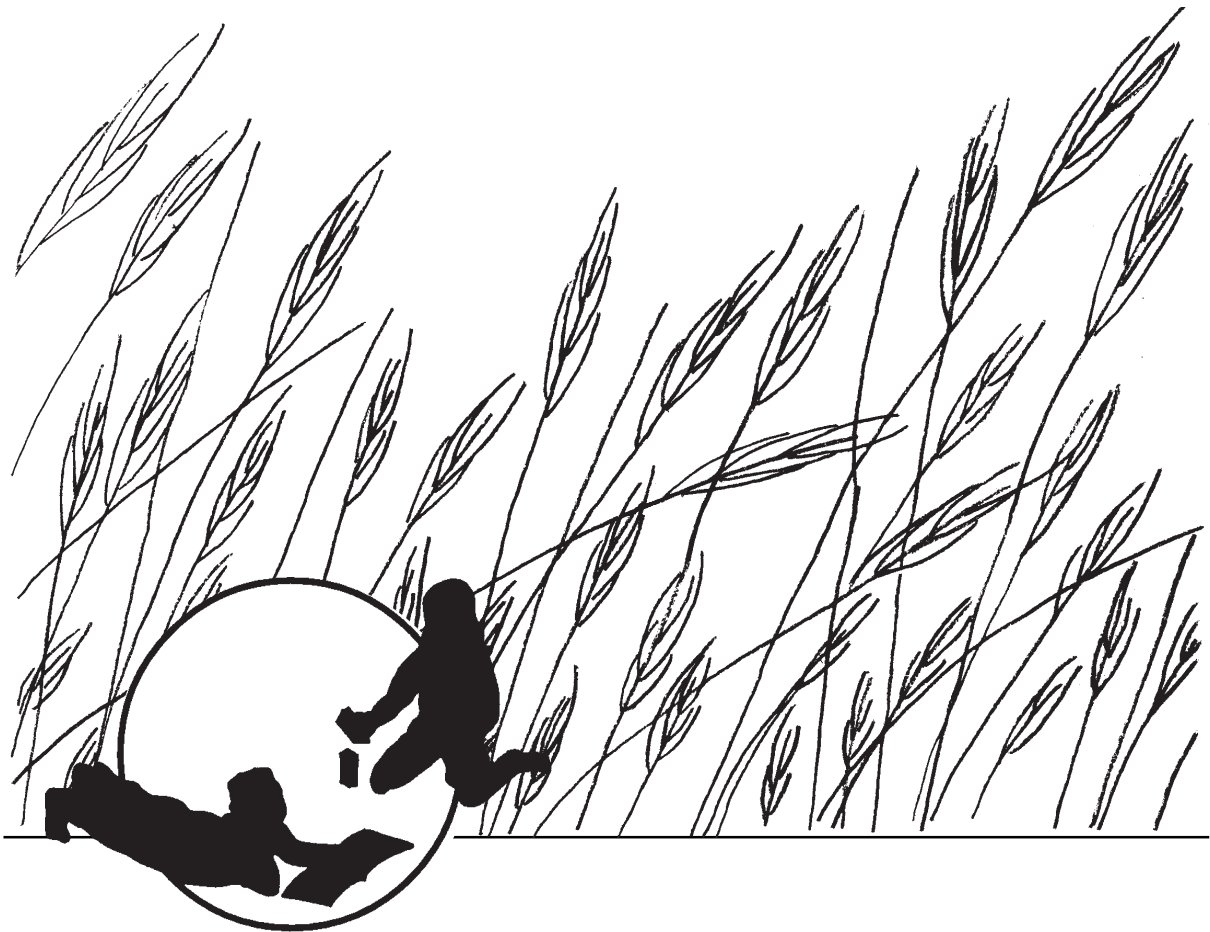


Iowa DE/AEA Early Childhood Network

Fact Sheet
on
Looping



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Looping — A Multiyear Experience

Looping is a multiyear placement for both the students and the teacher. Simply put, this means that students stay with the same teacher for more than one year. A teacher, for example, would begin with a first grade class and continue with this same class through the second grade. The teacher would then begin again with a new first grade class and repeat the two-year-cycle. This arrangement does require the collaboration of at least two teachers but does not require additional classroom space nor funding to implement (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995).

Much of a young child's learning is based on relationships and is social in nature. A multiyear experience allows students to build strong social and interpersonal relationships with their teacher and peers. A looping schedule gives students and parents plenty of time to build and sustain personal relationships over time. The sense of family or community that develops can help to strengthen the connection between the school and families (Checkley, 1995).

Numerous social and academic benefits accrue when a teacher stays with a group of students for more than one year (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995; Checkley, 1995):

- fewer student/teacher transitions;
- the teacher has fewer students and parents with whom to relate over a longer period of time, allowing for more in-depth knowledge about the students and their needs;
- attendance improves;
- overall, the discipline improves;
- curriculum themes and concepts can be spread over a longer period of time, allowing for more in-depth study and understanding;
- learning time increases as the students are already familiar with the teacher and routines during the second year;
- fewer grade-level retentions;
- an increased sense of stability & consistency for students;
- opportunities for teachers to better individualize curriculum and instruction;
- reduced apprehension about the new school year during the second year;
- development of a sense of community in the classroom;
- greater support for children who look to school as a stabilizing influence in their lives;
- increased student self-confidence;
- better communication and interpersonal skills are promoted.

While many experts believe that the potential advantages of looping outweigh the potential disadvantages, there is a concern that should be given consideration—the possibility of a bad match between teachers and students or among individual students or groups of students. This is the same concern that schools face each year when making class assignments, but because of the two year commitment, a plan and support system should be in place to help students, parents, and teachers deal with the issue(s). As a last resort, moving the student to a new classroom might be an option. It is important to achieve a balance between the potential advantages of looping and the needs of an individual student for a new start (Checkley, 1995; Hanson, 1995).

Several other concerns should also be considered when planning a looping schedule (Hanson, 1995):

- the separation period at the end of the two-year-cycle might be difficult for teachers and students;
- the need to be extra-sensitive to new students who join the classroom;
- little long-term research exists to support anecdotal findings of potential advantages.

Multiyear programs are not new to education. In the past, looping has been most common in schools where enrollment fluctuations, staffing challenges, and scheduling issues called for creativity and flexibility. Today, looping is often a planned schedule to meet the needs of students and as a multiyear alternative to multi-aged groupings.

Two questions posed by educators, April Schilb and Michael Simkins, provide a beginning for possible discussions if schools are considering looping a scheduling innovation (Checkley, 1995):

“Why uproot kids year after year and expect them to relearn a new set of rules each year?” (Schilb)

“Where else (but at school) do you keep changing significant people in your life and think it's good?” (Simkins)

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