SCHOOL SCHEDULING AND AT-RISK STUDENTS: LOOPED PERSPECTIVES FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT

by

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ABSTRACT

KYLE R. KESTER. School scheduling and at-risk students: Looped perspectives for academic support. (Under the direction of DR. BRUCE TAYLOR)

Students are graduating without requisite skills needed for life beyond high school- or not graduating at all (Institute of Education, 2014; New American Education, 2014). How do current school scheduling models affect the learning of students for academic support? Does a looping model affect students' academically or socially? This qualitative case study examines the perspectives of high school students who are at-risk in both looped and non-looped classes, as well as their teachers, through interviews, written reflections, and archival data. Findings include academic achievement, self-efficacy, and relationships with teachers, students, and the school community. Students who participated in a loop for purposes of academic support expressed deeper relationships with their teachers and perceptions of academic improvement and self-confidence.

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"I have hated words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right."

— Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I miss them: the general education and inclusion students that I taught as first-semester freshmen, lost and uncertain, who eventually found their places within the big, daunting world of high school. Many of those same students I taught as sophomores through random assignment: we conquered writing and the world- literally, for 10th grade is World Literature, and almost all were successful. When several of those students once again appeared in my classroom their junior year, it was like coming home: not just for them, but for me as well. Their senior year, a disappointing turn of events: I was back with sophomores while they were preparing to graduate. Alas, they were still with me, for few days passed that at least one of "my" kids did not stop by. Now they are on to bigger and better things: college, jobs, or the military. But they remain, forever, "my class," for during the three years we spent together, we bonded and, to some degree, became part of each other's lives. Personally, though I've never experienced a formal academic looping scenario, I enjoy teaching students for more than one semester, as it seems to breed familiarity and a greater sense of efficacy.

Looping is when a teacher moves with her students to the next grade level or course, possibly for several years (Burke, 1996). Maintaining the educational relationship beyond one semester is something that I have always personally enjoyed, both as a teacher and as a student who has had the experience of being with the same teacher several times. On both accounts, I like knowing exactly what to expect and being part of relationships that last more than a fleeting semester. The more I considered this prospect, the more I wondered what the research reveals about this type of program. Is

this truly best practice, or is it merely something that my introverted, inhibited self prefers so I don't have to deal with as many people?

Looping is the practice of keeping a group of students together with the same teacher for more than one year or semester; essentially, the teacher moves with her students to the next level after completion of the course (Burke, 1996; Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Gregory, 2009). This concept is practiced only occasionally in the United States, although other parts of the world have been proponents of the idea for centuries (Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). When looping is implemented in the United States, it is typically used with elementary or middle school students. Very little research can be found about the utilization of looping at the secondary level.

Consistency is a significant factor many students are lacking, thus the stability that looping can provide could be a significant benefit when it is used (Kominski, Jamieson & Martinez, 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1999). Furthermore, looping, as an organizational structure, tends to promote meaningful relationships and increase academic growth since it allows more time for teaching and individualized instruction (Grant, et. al, 1996; Thompson, 2009). Kelly (2004) and Gregory (2009) have found that looped students often make significant academic gains over non-looped students. Since many students are deemed at-risk and fail to graduate on time, having consistency and stability that looping programs may provide could provide needed supports for at-risk students. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of at-risk students who participated in a looping program for academic support during their ninth-grade year.

Problem Statement

The most recent data available, from school year 2011-2012, designates a cohort graduation rate of approximately 80%; this means that only four out of every five high school students graduate on time with their classes (Institute of Education, 2014). While it appears that there is no significant change in cohort graduation rates from 2010-2011 to 2011- 2012, it is worth noting that this implies there has been no decrease in the rate (National Education Association, 2014). Minority students continue to comprise the majority of the students who do not graduate with their class in both public and private institutions, (Institute of Education, 2014). Research indicates lack of personal relationships, academic concern, effective role models, and school connection as key factors in school attrition for these students (Haslinger, et al.,1996; Kominski, et al, 2011; Sagor & Cox, 2004). The "factory model of schools," implemented in the early 1900s in the United States and still largely employed, is often considered to be outdated today. Many scholars argue that this model does not meet the educational needs of America's students today (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gregory, 2009; Hansen, 1995). Darling-Hammond has described the model thus: "the large, age-graded departmentalized schools were designed for the efficient batch processing of masses of children in the new age of compulsory education and large-scale immigration" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 13). Some feel that this is problematic and conveyer-belt-like, with its focuses on memorization and standardized curriculum, and that the factory model has little concern for students as individuals with their own learning styles and educational needs (Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000). In 1900, only 17% of all jobs required so-called knowledge workers, whereas over 60% do today (New American Education, 2014).

Critics of the factory model argue that, while both technology and the workforce have flourished exponentially, American schools have stayed virtually the same; therefore, the chasm between the needs of the country and the results of the public school system is deepening (Darling-Hammond, 1997), and that, once again, educational reform is needed in order to meet the ever-changing demands of the current workforce and culture. Looping, the process of keeping the same class together with the same teacher(s) over several school years or semesters, is often practiced at the elementary or middle school levels and has been indicated to potentially ameliorate some of these concerns (Burke, 1996; Grant, et al., 1996).

Research suggests looping could be a particularly effective tool for students who are at-risk for dropping out of high school. At-risk students are often lacking the support and constancy they need to persist throughout high school (Kominski, et. al, 2011; Sagor & Cox, 2004). Looping can provide this support by helping them maintain these healthy relationships and make the academic progress needed to reach graduation if implemented at the high school level.

Theoretical Framework

Because the social interactions play a large role in high school, this study is situated within the area of sociocultural theory, which describes learning as a social process wherein social interaction is a key component of learning and cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Lave and Etienne (1991) expanded upon Vygotsky's theories while developing the concepts of Situated Learning Theory and Communities of Practice. Lave believed no learning exists that is not situated and all learning occurs normally via culture, context, and activity according to Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996. Therefore,

the interactions that happen within a community of practice (cooperation, problem solving skills, building trust, understanding and appropriate relations) can foster community social capital, which then improves the wellbeing of said community participants (Lave, & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas about legitimate peripheral participation, that is, the ways in which learners move towards full participation in a group as they assimilate to the culture of the group and simultaneously develop mastery of skills and knowledge, are highlighted by studies of looping communities and the relationships which help build both community and foster learning (Gregory, 2009) The model of a looping classroom is further supported by clarifying why it is an advantage for students who are at-risk: the very skills and support systems these students are so often missing are present and fostered within a looped environment. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of at-risk students who participated in a looping program for academic support during their ninth-grade year

Purpose Statement

Like many other high schools, the school in this study is continuously seeking solutions to better meet the needs of high school students who are at-risk for dropping out. These students are typically missing the support and structure necessary to persist in high school. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of at-risk students who participated in a looping program for academic support during their ninth-grade year. Students who did not participate in a loop during their ninth-grade year, as well as teachers who taught both types of classes, were also interviewed to provide background and triangulation.

Research Questions

1. How do high school students describe their experiences in looped English classes?
2. How does the looping method of scheduling English classes affect high school students academically and socially?

A case study model was used to investigate these questions. Information was gathered through participant interviews and written reflections, as well as archival school data.

Significance of Study

This study can provide fodder for discussions as school administrators begin to think about new ways to restructure schools to meet the needs of students who are at-risk. As looping has been shown to have many benefits with elementary aged students academically, socially, and behaviorally, examination of the experiences of high school students adds new components to the looping and scheduling conversations.

Conclusion

In the next chapter, I discuss the literature as it pertains to problems with the current model of school scheduling and the status of at-risk students within the factory model of schooling, as well as the benefits and potential problems with looping as they have been noted at the elementary and middle school levels. I advocate for the need to explore the application of looping in high schools to see if it can be used as a way of serving at-risk students and increasing the cohort graduation rate. The site for this research will be the school in which I teach, though I am not involved in the looping scenario.

Chapter 3 discusses my methodology for this qualitative case study.

Chapter 4 provides analysis of interviews, reflections, and other data collected throughout the duration of the study.

Chapter 5 discusses findings of the study, implications for the future, and concluding remarks. It is followed by an appendix of additional information and the references utilized within this dissertation.

Definitions of Terms

Looping: a school scheduling model that keeps the same students with the same teacher for more than one year or semester if the school has blocked scheduling where courses last a single semester. Similar models include academic support cohorts, continuous learning, multi-year grouping, or persisting groups. The school utilized in this study defines looping as the same group moving from Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) to English I with the same teacher within the same school year (2 consecutive classes during one year) and/or Foundations of Math (FM) to Math 1 in the same fashion

At-Risk: possessing one or more factors that decrease a student's likelihood of achieving cohort graduation, specifically in terms of absences, grades, and discipline referrals. In this school, the students deemed at-risk are identified by the school's graduation committee based primarily on those three factors.

Cohort: the group of students who entered high school together (and should therefore graduate together four years later).

Traditional, non-looped, factory model: Non-looped experiences can be termed all these ways; however, in this document, the term non-looped will be used throughout to indicate the model of schooling often with random, computer-based assignment of classes and teachers.

Academic factors: those factors that influence a student's learning process and school achievement.

Maturing: reaching an increased stage of mental or emotional development; an on-going process.

Student behavior: positive and negative interactions of students in school or communities, encompassing discipline, attendance, etc.

Self-perception: the mental image or ideas one has about him- or herself.

Social factors: factors that involve a student's interactions with other people or those factors that influence such interactions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

American high schools deal with a plethora of problems: teacher shortages, insufficient funds, mental health, and school violence, to name a few. High school graduation rates are a pressing concern for most high schools (National, 2015). Students deemed likely to drop out are identified as "at-risk" and often need extra support and guidance to persist in school (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010; Sladin & Madden, 1989). Many educators believe schools are currently not effectively meeting the needs of these students and that more support needs to be provided (Ravitch, 2001; Sagor & Cox, 2004). Looping, which many believe provides significant support for at-risk students in the elementary and middle grades, could provide likewise useful in secondary schools to help students persist to graduation (Burke, et. al, 1996; Thompson, 2009; Zahorik, & Dichanz, 1994).

In this chapter, I present scholarship regarding the current factory model of schooling and its benefits and detriments, define what it means to be at-risk, and explain how the factory model may be ineffective for most at-risk students. Next, looping is presented as a support structure for at-risk students, and I discuss cognitively centering the looping classroom, benefits of looping, and challenges of looping.

Current Climate of Schools

Today, schools in America face a plethora of issues that affect both the climate of individual schools and national perceptions. Matters such as immigration, the economy, and politics affect teachers' and schools' needs by way of legislation, community concerns, and resource allocation (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Educational issues are forefront in many political and news discussions; Common Core, testing and accountability, and

teacher retention and training affect every district (Spring, 2015). Ever-changing technology and prominent social media are constantly changing learning environments, communication techniques, personal relationships, and the culture of schools themselves (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Each of these issues can affect and change the ways in which schools must conduct themselves in order to be perceived as successful (Senge, et. al., 2012). Though schools, as well as their students and challenges, are constantly changing, the basic organizational structure of American high schools has remained largely the same since the 1800s.

The History of the Factory Model

In the late 1800s, America was experiencing both periods of enlightenment and industrialization; thus, there was an obvious need for noteworthy changes within schooling systems (Stabler, 1987). Schools were rapidly becoming considered a source of upward mobility, and enrollment in public schools was soaring for different types of students due to the increases of urbanization and immigration as the United States became known by its new moniker, "the melting pot" (New American Education, 2014). The increase in factories coupled with a rise in the manual labor workforce affected the ways needed to be run and the end goals for graduating students.

Not only was the cultural climate of the country evolving in ways that had never before been imagined, but the decentralization of schools was causing chaos (New American Education, 2014). Because there was a lack of regulation of teachers, schools, or school systems, and because individual areas allowed school boards to have control, governing however they saw fit and according to their own agendas, it was nearly impossible to have continuity across states or districts (Pestalozzi, 1827).

In response to “decades of intense immigration, the dominance of assembly line production techniques, and the sway of scientific management” (Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000) change was imminent. During this time period, Horace Mann, a leader in education and educational reform during this time, was charged with the task of investigating and completing extensive research with regards to models of education in other countries in order to make appropriate recommendations for the rapidly developing United States.

Pestalozzi’s Prussian model of schools.

As he researched, Mann came across Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s model of schooling, also called the Prussian-Industrial model. Pestalozzi was a Swiss pedagogue and humanitarian whose principles are often summarized via the motto “head, heart, hands”, and he strived to offer “insight into how schools can be more child-oriented and produce better-educated school-leavers” (Pestalozzi, 1827). In order to accomplish these goals, Pestalozzian schools stressed several components that were in direct conflict with the typical schools of the time, including (but not limited to) the following:

- the importance of hands-on activities and problem solving over rote learning and memorization
- increasing focus on academics over religion
- a combination of education with work experience (New American Education, 2014).

Furthermore, Pestalozzi believed that meaningful experience creates productive people (Pestalozzi, 1827); therefore, he tried to integrate legitimate learning experiences into the curriculum whenever possible. These schools endeavored to create an environment

appropriate for the “achievement of freedom in autonomy for one and all” (Stabler, 1987), which sounds like an inclusive environment for at-risk students (as well as all different types of students) if ever there was one. Additionally, at this time, the school was seen as a production unit which would allow children to finance their own learning and thus be under no obligation to anyone other than themselves (New American Education, 2014).

Mann believed in the need for increased funding for education and public libraries, which supported his beliefs that the economic wealth of the country would increase through an educated public and that “strength of mind makes up for weakness of body” (New American Education, 2014). He thought that this model could be useful and effective within the United States due to its growing industrialization and urbanization, so he began to champion utilization of the Prussian “factory model” of schooling in America (Stabler, 1987). This was “the first great movement toward an organized system of common education, which shall, at once, be thorough and universal,” which worked to solve the problems of school decentralization and also fit in with his goals of allowing (and actually encouraging) education for all – which led to our modern concept of free, public education (Pestalozzi, 1827). Mann envisioned this new educational system as an opportunity to destroy class distinctions and guarantee social and economic equality (New American Education, 2014).

System today.

Within the current construct of schools, the teacher is specialized in a content area and serves as an expert in his or her area of instruction. When this occurs, teachers are able to focus on their personal strengths and areas of interest, allowing them to master

content relevant to themselves and focus on lesson planning (Hood, 2010). This benefits the students since their teacher is actively engaged with and interested in the curriculum, which can increase test scores, allowing teachers to collaborate about curriculum and individual students as well as to share their passions for the subject they are specializing in (Freyer, 2016; Hood, 2010). Specialization of teachers (sometimes called departmentalization or platooning) in the elementary schools also better prepares students for the structures they will likely encounter in middle and high schools (Freyer, 2016). Similarly, the current factory model of schools promotes focus on curriculum by designating specific amounts of time for each subject area, ensuring that no one subject area gets short changed in terms of time or energy (Hood, 2010).

Schools were organized thus because of the increase in technology (specifically the assembly line, hence "factory model"). The graded systems and resulting cohorts allow students to be processed as batches, which can be seen as efficient and effective for the majority of students (Stabler, 1987). As the field of technology has exploded over the past few decades, schools have been able to implement some aspects of the digital world in the same ways in which students will be exposed to them later in life: students learn via digital books, games, software and apps that allow the manipulation of data and information for a variety of purposes, which can allow customization of education within the existing structure of schools (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Nielsen, 2013).

Accountability is a major consideration in schooling today. Licensure requirements for schools and staff provide a minimum level of qualification and adequacy and helps to level the playing field for all students (Serafini, 2002). Furthermore, the inclusion of standardized testing has provided another layer of

accountability for both students and staff. "The abundance of testing in contemporary American society is just one more manifestation of the desire to control, to be 'scientific' and to leave nothing to chance'" (Murphy, 1997, p 262). Furthermore, "standardized testing is, perhaps, a prototypical exemplar of this broader desire to control chance. The ultimate reward for using standardized tests, then, was that education could be made more efficient and effective" (Murphy, 1997, p. 263).

This factory model of schooling is adaptable and has been in place for over a hundred years, but, as we will see, despite its staying power, there are concerns.

Current Criticisms

The current factory model of schooling has been criticized as being outdated and ineffective (Hood, 1995; Ravitch, 2001). With increasing public concern regarding both closing the achievement gap and decreasing the dropout rate (Hood, 1995; Sagor & Cox, 2004), schools and school systems need to consider looking beyond current educational and scheduling models being utilized within American schools to find ways to appropriately meet the needs of at-risk students. Implementing looping at the secondary level may be one way to meet these needs and mitigate the number of dropouts.

There are other critiques of the current school scheduling model. Darling-Hammond (1997) described the model thus: "the large, age-graded departmentalized schools were designed for the efficient batch processing of masses of children in the new age of compulsory education and large-scale immigration" (p 13). Many educators feel this model is problematic and conveyer-belt-like, focusing on simple memorization and standardized curriculum, and expressing little concern for students as individuals with their own learning styles and educational needs (Ravitch, 2001; Schneider, Teske, &

Marschall, 2000). “Industrial schools are hopelessly failing!” notes Senge, et. al (2012, p.18). Similar concerns have also been raised for teachers and school systems themselves: John Hood (1995) cites rigid personnel rules and regulations, uniform salary schedules, a civil service system, monopoly, politics, and centralized, top-down decision making as major factors in current school struggles. In 1900, only 17% of all jobs required knowledge workers, whereas over 60% do today (New Academy, 2014).

Critics of this model contend that technology and the workforce have grown and changed substantially, yet American schools have stayed virtually the same; the chasm between the needs of the country and the graduates of the schools is deepening; and that, once again, educational reform is needed in order to meet the ever-changing demands of the current workforce and culture (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ravitch, 2001).

Students who are at-risk often lack the personal support or skills necessary to allow them to be successful in a traditional, non-looped factory-model school (that is what makes them at-risk for dropping out). Furthermore, and because so many students today fit into the at-risk category, close examination and potential reformation of the structure of schooling is needed (Kominski, Jamieson, & Martinez, 2011; Metzger, 2015).

At-Risk Students

Some research suggests that the factory model is especially ineffective when it comes to meeting the needs of students deemed at-risk for dropping out of school (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hood, 1995; Metzger, 2015). The multitude of circumstances that comprise at-risk students are too complex and multifaceted to be appropriately addressed by this current model which emphasizes efficiency over empathy and works by

passing kids along from one set of hands to another with little consistency or structure from one grade level to the next. Re-structuring of schools, specifically the way(s) in which schedules at the secondary level are created and implemented, may offer a viable way to offer support to these students.

Students who are at-risk for dropping out of high school are placed into this category due to the presence of a myriad of factors, both familial and personal. Familial factors placing a student at risk include non-traditional family structure, low socioeconomic status, parental education level, and lacking support system (Kominski, Jamieson & Martinez, 2011; Metzger, 2015; Sagor & Cox, 2004; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Meanwhile, personal risk factors can be comprised of educational disability, poor attendance, juvenile delinquency, legal truancy, emotional turmoil, grade retention, and language deficits (Kominski, Jamieson & Martinez, 2011; Sagor & Cox, 2004; Slavin & Madden, 1989) among other things. The more factors a student possesses, the more likely that student is considered to drop out of high school without earning a diploma (Slavin & Madden, 1989). Likewise, any student who is deemed as "unlikely to graduate, on schedule, with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships" can be included in the at-risk category (Sagor & Cox, 2004, p. 1)

Approximately half of the factors comprising the at-risk status relate to one's support system, specifically his/her family (Kominski, Jamieson & Martinez, 2011). In the current model, students are directed from room to room, bell to bell, teacher to teacher, being subjected to generally rigid instructional methods and models with little individualized support or consistency throughout the day or from one year to another

(Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). They are provided with few meaningful incentives for success or achievement, once again being treated as parts on a conveyor belt with little consideration as individuals (Slavin & Madden, 1989), which is the very thing they are often lacking. Additionally, access is typically inequitable, with the best and brightest (and typically the most affluent) students being the ones with access to the newest technology, latest resources and teaching methods, field trips, and other educational benefits (Nielsen, 2013; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). This puts the at-risk students who likely have no other means by which to experience these opportunities at the greatest disadvantage again (Sagor & Cox, 2004) and necessitates the need for reform of current school structuring to create an environment that is potentially more equitably situated for all high school students.

Different models of school support and reform have been proposed and implemented to help meet the needs of at-risk schools. Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools proposed common principles that effective schools should have to meet the needs of all learners; these included personalization, commitment to the entire school, and a tone of decency and trust (Sizer, 1985). Though it officially ended in 2016, the work by the Coalition of Essential Schools, including ideas of restructuring large schools into "small schools" and foundational work on problem-based learning, continue to influence educational policies today (Coalition, 2018). Similar ideas were embraced by Littky, creator of The Met schools, who re-envisioned schools as places where authentic learning takes place. Littky and Grabelle (2004) expressed their vision for schools:

> Let kids learn in settings where adults are doing interesting work. Let novices learn from masters. The Big Picture model creates a part-time community where

> students can use their expanding knowledge of the real work as a foundation for new growth—an environment where they can learn about being a member of a peer group, where they can reflect on what they are doing at their work sites, and where they can hone skills and explore concepts that, they are coming to realize, will be critical to their futures. (p. vii)

The implementation of these alternate visions for schooling and ideas for school reform attest to the fact that the factory model of schooling is not meeting the needs of many students today, especially those who are deemed at-risk.

Looping

Another alternative to the traditional model of school scheduling that can potentially assist in alleviating the dropout problem is looping. Looping is the practice of keeping the same group of students together with the same teacher over several years or semesters (Burke, 1996; Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Gregory, 2009; Jacoby, 1995). In elementary schools, one teacher typically decides to travel up through the grades with her class while another teacher agrees to drop back (Grant et al., 1996). For example, if a second-grade teacher loops with his class to third grade, a third grade teacher would agree to go to second grade for the year while the other teacher moved up. It is sometimes not necessary for a second teacher to switch down to replace the looping teacher if the grade level is large or depending on staff turnover (Burke, 1996). With high school students, the model is slightly different: the same group of students might have the same teacher, for example, for English I and II, in order to build foundational skills and have a mentor as they acclimate to high school. This could also work with a foundational level class that would then loop into the "regular" class (i.e. Foundations of

Math 1 stays together and subsequently becomes Math 1). In some models of looping, students, teacher(s), and some support staff (EC teachers, assistants, one-on-one personnel, etc.) would remain a team (Zepeda & Mayer, 2006).

While looping at the secondary level is relatively novel in the United States, it is and has been practiced all over the world. Germany, with its Waldorf Schools, has been a proponent of looping, keeping students and teachers together from first through eighth grades (Zahorik, & Dichanz, 1994). Waldorf schools were explicitly created to meet the specific needs of students whose parents were immigrant factory workers and therefore needed added support and structure from school which they lacked at home (Thompson, 2009). German school teachers found the consistency and relationships resulting from the looping process so compelling that looping continues to persist: students and teachers remain looped in all elementary schools for grades one through four (Jacoby, 1995). While striving to expand the Waldorf concept, looping is often touted for the intimacy that can be created for students, allowing them to learn about themselves and others with whom they share the classroom and creating a "culture of caring" that allows students to learn cooperation through a focus on academics (Carroll, 2012).

Furthermore, although some variety exists within the structure, in Germany, and beyond, looping is employed in both elementary and secondary school settings (Zahorik, & Dichanz, 1994). Additionally, Japan, China, Italy, and other European countries still utilize the idea of looping as an important part of their educational structure today, especially in the primary grades (Grant, 1996; Thompson, 2009).

Cognitively Centering the Looped Classroom

The concept of looping is consonant with Vygotsky's social development theory (1978), as it is based on the idea of meeting the needs of at-risk students by creating close-knit groups which will heighten the academic and social growth of students. Vygotsky's theory asserts community plays a vital part in helping students make meaning and explains the central role of all social interaction is to develop a person's cognition (Gallagher, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). This suggests that the community produced in a looped classroom could support the development of both students' social and academic skills. Vygotsky (1978) contends the development of each student depends on the context of situation (both social and cultural). Moreover, social interaction involving cooperative or shared discourse encourages cognitive development (Gallagher, 1999). Thus, the familiar and non-threatening environment of the looped classroom benefits cognitive development of the students involved.

Lave (1991) expanded upon Vygoysky's theories when she developed the concepts of Situated Learning Theory and Communities of Practice. Lave believed no learning exists that is not situated and all learning occurs normally via culture, context, and activity (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996). Therefore, the interactions that happen within a community of practice (cooperation, problem solving skills, building trust, understanding and appropriate relations) can foster community social capital, which then improves the well-being of said community participants (Lave, & Wenger, 1991). Figure 1 (below) presents a model of Lave's work. Lave and Wegner's (1991) ideas about legitimate peripheral participation, that is, the ways in which learners move towards full participation in a group as they assimilate to the culture of the group and simultaneously

develop mastery of skills and knowledge, are highlighted by studies of looping communities and the relationships which help build both community and foster learning (Gregory, 2009; Jacoby, 1995). Moreover, Lave and Wegner's ideas suggest potential advantages by clarifying why it is such an advantage for students who are at-risk: the very skills and support systems these students are so often missing are present and established more completely within a looped environment (Kelley, 2004; Lindsay, Irving, Tanner, & Underdue, 2008).

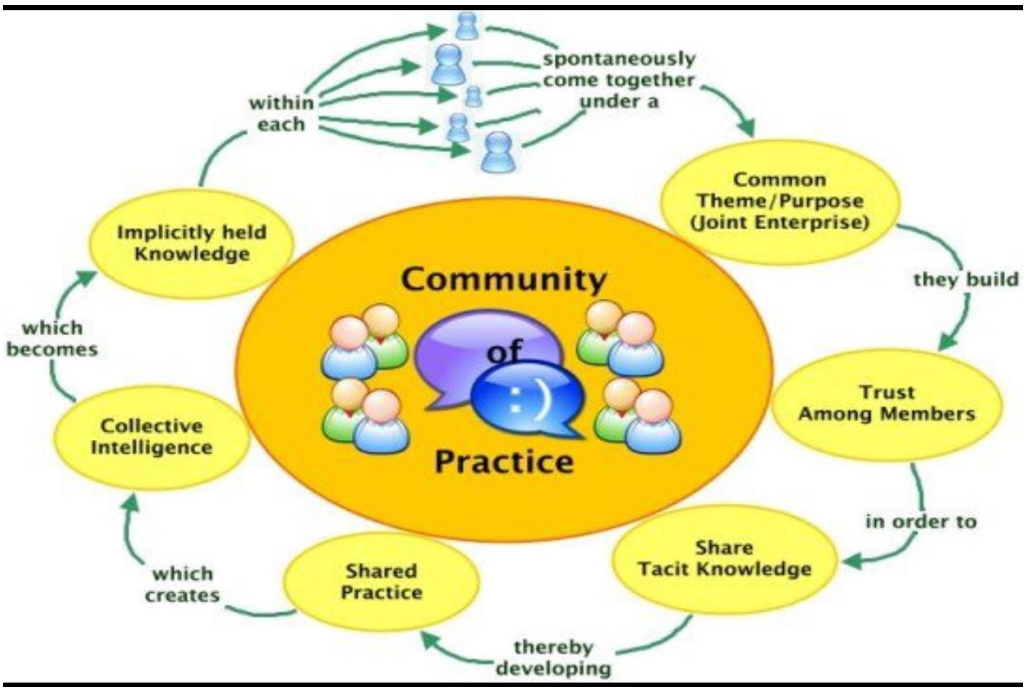

Figure 1: Communities of practice: A framework for learning and development (Pennington, 2011).

Having a connection to the overall school community is integral for student success in high school, and this trait seems to be fostered within a looping community. Educational theorists have advocated for the idea of a community of learners which clearly supports the benefits of this concept through learning appropriate social skills and interactions in a safe environment (Thompson, 2009). Looping students are more likely

to achieve because of this new-found sense of togetherness: students learn together, solve problems together, create meaning together, and understand concepts together (Thompson, 2009).

Benefits of Looping

Research suggests that looping can have significant effects on students (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Wynne, & Walberg, 1994; Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). Looping as an organizational structure can promote both meaningful relationships on a myriad of levels and effective, authentic learning (Thompson, 2009). Looping has several documented positive effects on schooling when implemented with elementary and middle school students: improved achievement, increased time, developed relationships, student behavior and attitudes, increased self-esteem, and parental involvement (Gregory, 2009; Kelley, 2009; Lindsay, Irving, Tanner, & Underdue, 2008; Pecanic, 2003).

Achievement.

In the current educational climate, test scores matter: they determine grades, labels, promotion or retention for students, bonuses for teachers and principals, status for the school (Gregory, 2009; Kelley, 2004; Kohn, 2000; Tienken, 2012). Several studies suggest that looping provides notably higher standardized test scores than traditionally organized schools where students switch teachers each year (Gregory, 2009; Kelley, 2004; Pecanic, 2003). In a Cleveland-based looping program, students in looping classes scored substantially higher on standardized tests of reading and mathematics than did students in regular classes (Burke, 1997; Gaustad, 1998). Daniel Burke (1997) reports this academic achievement occurred "even when both groups were taught *by the same teacher*," (emphasis in the original). Academic benefits are also increased by improved

individualized instruction and, therefore, more appropriate learning for each individual student (Wynne & Walberg, 1994). Additional time gained from looping gives teachers the opportunity to assess student achievement and diagnose any potential academic problems in a more timely fashion than is typically possible in regularly scheduled classrooms (Thompson, 2009). Similarly, in subsequent years, the looping teacher is more equipped to activate the prior knowledge of each individual student and of the class as a whole (Pecanic, 2003) as her knowledge and understanding of the students and group itself increases over time. Swanson (1999) asserts the following:

> Looping allows the teacher to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of the individual, rather than attempting to meet the needs of the whole class. The one sure way to improve student achievement is to know each student and work collaboratively with parents to meet that student's academic needs (p. 44).

Thus, research supports that academic gains are present when looping is utilized. In a study by Kelley (2004) comparing reading scores of looped versus non-looped students, looped students had an approximate average gain of one year and two and a half months; meanwhile, the control (non-looped) group's average academic gain was only about eight months. The looped group gained over four more months' worth of growth in the same amount of time, an undeniably significant amount, especially to students who struggle for various reasons (English Language Learners, students with learning disabilities, or students with other factors for being at-risk). Gregory (2009) and Lindsay (2008) report similar gains in mathematics, writing, and other areas, thus lending support to the idea looping does, in fact, increase the academic gains of some students. This difference in achievement may be a result of looping teachers' increased knowledge regarding their

student's academic strengths and weakness (Carroll, 2012; Gregory, 2009). Since one reason for schooling is increasing learning or academic achievement, these findings could be significant with regards to the argument in favor of the looping model of school scheduling.

Time.

A recommendation from the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (2005) was that "state and local boards work with schools to redesign education so that time becomes a factor supporting learning, not a boundary marking its limits" (p. 1). An additional benefit of looping is time saved. Most of this time can be found in the beginning of the second and any subsequent school years or semesters, where some researchers assert almost a month is spent in "getting to know you" activities and procedures (Burke, 1996; Hanson, 1995). A great deal of class time can be saved with looping, allowing students and teachers to immediately engage in the new curriculum. Looping classes can bypass all the mundane introductory tasks involved in figuring out how the year will go and general management responsibilities are reduced (Gaustad, 1998; Hanson, 1995). In other words, the first day of the second year of school is more like coming home after an extended vacation than moving to somewhere new (Mazzuchi, & Brooks, 1992). More time is spent on learning and teaching the curriculum, and everyone benefits.

Additionally, for well-established looping programs, even more time can be gained at the end of the school year, when "instead of spending the last weeks packing students up and getting them ready to move on, teachers can spend time laying the foundation for the second year's learning" (Pecanic, 2003). This additional time can

prove invaluable in providing the struggling students an opportunity to catch up with the more developmentally or academically on-target students, reducing the "summer slide," which is particularly significant educational loss for at-risk students (Slates, Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2012; Tienken, 2012). Furthermore, students may be less likely to be retained since they have more time to learn basic skills in a comfortable environment (Thompson, 2009). The effective use of time this model presents can reduce referrals for exceptional children's services and allow for more remediation or enrichment for all types of learners—from those students who struggle to those who are considered above grade level (Thompson, 2009; Tienken, 2012).

In the same way, evidence suggests classroom time can be gained for looping students due to its effect on attendance (Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996; Gregory, 2009), and it is commonly accepted that attendance is a key factor in academic success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Rumberger, 1987). While truancy and poor attendance can predict a student's likelihood to drop out, missing school causes students to fall behind and can make it nearly impossible for students – especially those who struggle or lack support at home – to catch up academically (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Students who are absent are impacted socially as well, since they simply are not present to form meaningful bonds with peers via shared experiences, which in turn can perpetuate the cycle of absenteeism since without friends, students' school experiences are significantly impacted (Carroll, 2012; Rumberger, 1987). As students come to feel more valued and involved, the attendance of looping students can tend to increase. For instance, one looping school in Massachusetts reported that student attendance in elementary and middle grades increased from 92% average daily attendance to over 97% attendance daily

since they began the looping program (Haslinger, Kelly, & O'Lare, 1996). More time at school gives opportunities of more time for learning and making progress toward established academic goals. However, more than just time gained, the relationships cultivated are described as the real core of the looping program (Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996). Additional research is needed to examine the potential effects of the looping structure at the secondary level.

Improved relationships.

Having students and teachers stick together for extended periods of time can create deeper bonds between teachers and students and subsequently allow teachers to get to know each student as an individual: personalities, learning preferences. likes, and dislikes (Gaustad, 1998). In this manner, teachers could be able to more effectively design appropriate instruction for each student. Research also indicates that long-term relationships resulting from looping provides students with an intimate classroom environment and encourages thinking, risk-taking and classroom involvement (Lindsay, et al, 2008; Grant, et. al, 1996). The idea of long-term relationship building remains particularly true for minority students or those who could be considered at-risk. A looped classroom can provide support systems for those students who may need stable role models that are lacking in their personal lives (Burke, 1997; Carroll, 2012). The old adage rings true here: "students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Students who are deemed at-risk, in particular, often learn more and perform better academically with teachers who prove interested and invested in both their home and school lives (Hanson, 1995; Lindsay, et al, 2008). Likewise, a quality relationship between the teacher and the student can be integral since at-risk students

frequently appraise the effectiveness of their teacher based on how attentive the adult is to the student's lives with regards to both their academic and personal home situations (Lindsay, et al, 2008). Gregory (2009) found approximately 75 percent of upper-level students reported their relationships with both staff and peers were improved in a looping situation. Looping classrooms can allow for more profoundly formed attachments; thus, the student is more inclined to want to perform well in and feel vested toward the school, possibly affecting both the student's academic and behavioral outcomes.

Community.

A sense of community is important to the looping concept, and the strong relationships created within could be a key component. Pecanic (2003) found that classrooms involved in looping can create strong family-like bonds within their communities; this type of community can be particularly helpful for students who struggle in new situations due to excessive shyness or introversion, those who face significant instability outside of school, or those who do not adapt well to change. Hence, students can find an almost extended family atmosphere within their looping classroom: one that is accepting, inclusive, and concerned. This is an example of the kind of environment many at-risk students need to thrive, as it often allows for more authentic learning to take place within the classroom. Long term-relationships between students and the teacher could result in an emotional and intellectual climate that encourages critical thinking, risk taking, and increased involvement (Wynne & Walberg, 1994). Subsequently, the changing of teachers and classmates each year can make it difficult to develop healthy cohesion and in-depth teacher-student engagement or student/student relationships (Lindsay, et al, 2008); therefore, the looping model provides one potential

solution to this concern. For example, Hanson, a first-time looping teacher, describes the experience: “My original fears about changing to a new grade quickly disappeared as I moved from a curriculum-centered to a student-centered classroom,” (Laboratory, 1997). Teachers, in addition, can find enjoyment and experience less stress in sticking with the same students for several years or semesters. They, too, could be comforted by the consistency that the looping model provides.

Sense of self.

Having a set place within a looping community can lead to positive self-esteem; students often feel like they belong, and struggling to find belonging within a larger school community is less pressing when students feel accepted and valued within their long-term looping situation (Gregory, 2009; Sladin & Madden, 1989). Through looping, teachers are able to remain an integral part of students' lives; as such, teachers foster their students' social, emotional, and academic competence (Thompson, 2009). In a survey of parents whose children were involved in a loop program, Lindsay (2008) noted that some parents came to appreciate looping because classroom stability fostered social and psychological stability for students. Nervousness about beginning a new school year can be lessened when students are already familiar with the students, teacher, and classroom they will be placed in, thus allowing them to focus more quickly on content and curriculum (Carroll, 2012).

Parental involvement.

Better rapport and communication between parents and teachers can result in greater parent involvement. This, in turn, can lead to higher levels of student achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lindsay, 2008). Gustad (1998) found 70% of teachers

involved in a three-year loop reported their efforts to build relationships with parents were increased and that those parents were more receptive to contact from the school. Additionally, a survey conducted by Pecanic (2003) exposed parents' feelings that they have closer relationships with their children's teachers and increased productivity in parent/teacher conferences. One teacher reported the following: "their (the students') parents know me from last year. They know what to expect. They don't question my judgment. So whatever I send home, they don't question it. They know what kind of teacher I was from last year" (Lindsay, 2008, p. 339). Often, the relationship and trust have already been established; the parents have developed confidence in the teacher and her decisions, and the teacher knows what kind of support to expect from the parents of the repeater students. In some cases, after a two-year loop, parent and teacher relationships improved; subsequently, many parents requested a third year with the same teacher (Lindsay, 2008). Not only are parental perceptions of the school often more positive, but teachers can also benefit from increased involvement with the same parents for several years. One teacher explains that, particularly in large schools, remaining in contact with the same parents for several years can enable them to think of the school as an extended family or support system and builds a climate of trust (Haslinger, Kelly, & O'Lare, 1996). This can create a more positive working environment for the looping teacher and improve teacher retention and job satisfaction. One principal reports that the teachers in her school who participate in looping experience greater satisfaction than others (Lindsay, 2008).

Student behavior and attitudes.

Studies suggest that looping can create a positive impact on student behavior. One school district in Massachusetts with mandated elementary-level looping, for example, reports improvement in attendance rates, decreases in discipline write-ups, reductions in retentions, and declines in referrals for exceptional children services (Gustad, 1998). Some would assert the Hawthorne effect is also a factor in the behavior of looping students: that, based on prior experiences with the teacher and class, the expectation of success increases the likelihood of its achievement (Swanson, 1999). The student is aware of the positive expectations his teacher possesses for him; therefore, he could be more likely to follow school rules, stay out of trouble, and work hard to perform to the best of his ability. While the benefits can be numerous, as with any new implementation, there are some concerns to consider prior to implementation as well.

Concerns of Looping

Personality conflict.

The most commonly discussed concern with looping is one that can be found within any type of scheduling: personality conflict (between students or between student and teacher). This has been reported as a significant concern of parents: that in the looped class can extend from one class or year to another thus potentially compounding the problem (Gustad, 1998). Burke (1996) suggests that these problems are infrequent and the issues can typically be resolved with a schedule change for these students. It is also possible for the teacher to be ineffective with one or more students simply because the teacher's teaching style may not match the student's learning style (Pecanic, 2003). The problem can be resolved, and in many districts, students and parents voluntarily

participate in looping (Wynne & Walberg, 1994), so the issue is able to be addressed and those involved can be much more willing to work together to address any issues that do arise.

Transience.

Students who move out of district from their loop or who are newcomers to the program may experience some difficulty. If transitory students are involved in a looping situation, they may not remain within a school long enough to reap benefits from the looping situation (Pecanic, 2003). This is often the case in schools with many students classified as having a low socioeconomic status and who, therefore, change residences often (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). Furthermore, those students who transfer into a looping school or classroom face challenges because they do not have the prior experience with the classroom rules, procedures, norms, and experiences that the rest of the group has already established (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996). As noted below, some researchers feel that the greatest disadvantage is for students who are placed in a loop after it has already been established. Entering a looping classroom during the second term (or later) of the loop can negatively affect classroom cohesiveness and cause the new student to feel left out (Thompson, 2009) which is counterproductive to the looping philosophy. However, most students in Gregory's (2009) looping study did not feel that incorporation of new students into the loop was particularly difficult, nor did they feel that they had missed out on opportunities by being looped themselves. While many students did feel that cliques had or could form within a loop, most also felt that non-looping teams could and/or did form cliques as well (Gregory, 2009).

Conclusion

Past history and culture led to the creation of the factory model of schooling, which, for many students, may be adequate to meet their needs. However, some critics feel this model is outdated and irrelevant to the current American society. With regard to high school students, particular concern is given to students who are at-risk of dropping out or not graduating on time with their cohort. The looping model is one alternate way of scheduling kids that may help meet this particular group's needs. However, more research is needed to appropriately consider its social and academic impact on these students.

The vast majority of this information about looping has been gathered from studies conducted at elementary and middle schools. However, it makes sense that findings from these groups could be replicated in some form at the high school level as well. In becoming communities of practice, looped classrooms can offer some students support and structure so that they can learn to become successful both academically and socially (Grant, et al., 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). More time spent on instruction can create potential for more improved academic experiences regardless of the age of the student. Likewise, longer relationships can affect students' self-esteem, which can impact academic achievement and persistence toward graduation as well.

If this is the case, the implications of re-thinking high school scheduling can be significant in the following ways: improving academic performance, decreasing absenteeism, and building relationships. The looping model could potentially help decrease the drop-out rate for at-risk students at high schools across the United States.

The next chapter will explain the methodology for exploring any social and academic impact of looped students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

As looping is known primarily for the creation of relationships between teachers and students and students within the class themselves, the connection between this model and the idea of community of practice from Lave's situated learning theory is one that is worthy of consideration (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Since the perspective of the student is quite important, that particular point of view sheds a valuable light on the efficacy of this model of schooling as an intervention for students who are deemed at-risk of dropping out of high school.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of at-risk students who participated in a looping program for academic support during their ninth-grade year. Those who did not were also interviewed to provide background of an alternate experience that informed the analysis of the looped students' experience. The looping program was comprised of a fall Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) class continuing into English I and, in some cases, Foundations of Math I (FM) continued into Math I as well. The experiences of students from this scheduling format were used within this case study in which the students themselves served as the unit of analysis for the following questions:

1. How do high school students describe their experiences in looped English classes?
2. How does the looping method of scheduling English classes affect high school students academically and socially?

Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted using a case study format. Utilizing a case study method allowed me to examine looping through the experiences of a small number of students and the teachers leading these classes. Using a case study to examine the experiences of individual students allowed me to examine student perceptions of their individual experiences with the scheduling models they have participated in and make connections between and among groups.

This type of research is often used in social fields such as education, where many layers of an issue often overlap and create complexity (Glesne, 2006). This allows for educators to examine multiple aspects of the data to interpret meanings and ways of creating effective instruction (Charmaz, 2010).

As the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of at-risk students who participated in a looping program for academic support during their ninth-grade year, a case study method was appropriate, as the researcher could then closely examine the experiences of a small number of representative students.

"Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 435). The purpose of a case study is to create "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" - such as looping (Merriam, 1998, p. 16). Case studies often examine similarities and differences between groups based on the variable being researched (Barone, 2011; Glesne, 2006). This study proposed to examine the ideas of students who participated in a loop for academic support for 9th grade English. Through utilization of a case study, in depth study of a few participants served as representative by investigation of several types of

data (Creswell, 2009). Case studies are particularly useful when applied while trying to discover the effect of theoretical models based on real-life situations and utilizing a case study methodology allowed the researcher to analyze data via the creation of unique codes and delve further into elaboration regarding this concept of looping (Barone, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

This particular study performed investigation as a case study of looped students; students who were not looped also interviewed to provide additional context. Additionally, teachers of both groups were interviewed to provide insight into these types of experiences. Considering the participants in this way allowed a broader idea of student experiences in differing types of classrooms.

School description.

The student population at the research site is as follows: 87.5% White, 4.5% African American 4.5% Hispanic 2%, Multi-Racial 1.2%, Asian .2% Native American .06% Native Hawaiian. This is fairly representative of the county in which the school is located. Ten percent of the school population is made up of Exceptional Children, and the four-year cohort graduation rate is 89% as of 2015, which is an increase from previous years. In 2015, 28.74% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, and more students than in past years applied for fee waivers due to economic conditions. This school had the fewest dropouts of the 6 traditional schools within the county school system during the most recent year with available data; during the 2015-2016 school year, the cohort graduation rate was 90 percent.

Sampling methods.

Purposeful sampling was used within this study. The participants were students at the school at which I (the researcher) teach. Half of the student participants were part of a group of at-risk first-time ninth graders who participated in a loop and stayed with the same class and the same two teachers for the first half of the day all year. Table 1 provides an example of a typical schedule for a student in looped classes (with looped classes in bold):

Table 1: Sample looped schedule.

Semester	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
Fall 2015	**Strategic Reading and Writing**	**Foundations of Math 1**	Health and PE	Earth Science
Spring 2016	**English I**	**Math I**	Art	World History
	Looped	*Looped*		

The other half of the student participants was comprised of at-risk students who did not receive the support of a looped structure; they were simply treated as any other incoming freshmen and scheduled via the traditional, non-looped "factory model"; that is, whatever the computer produced was their schedule with no concern for which teachers or classmates they were placed with.

Participants were being deemed at-risk by possessing factors such as poor attendance and/or grades or discipline issues (Sagor & Cox, 2004). The students who made up the sample as a whole were representative of the school: predominantly White, middle class, two working parents, living in a single-family home. I focused on students

who were at-risk, but who were not otherwise being served by the school system through the Exceptional Children's Program due to a diagnosed learning disability.

Additionally, two teachers of looped classes were questioned to provide another means of data triangulation. These two teachers provided additional insight into the happenings of both types of classrooms. Descriptions of the teachers are included to provide their background, experience, and thoughts on the looped and non-looped experiences. Both teachers have experience teaching traditional block classes as well as looped classes, and both teachers discuss their observations of each type of scheduling scenario.

Participation was voluntary with informed consent from six students who met the following criteria:

1. students must possess factors (including attendance problems, previous school failure, and disciplinary incident reports) which include them under the umbrella of "at-risk" status, and,
2. students and parents must sign consent and assent forms to participate.

Half of the students were looped, the remaining students were not. The sampled population was as close to the school population in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status as possible via volunteers to increase reliability and validity (McMillan, 2008).

Data Collection

Within the field of grounded theory, "all is data," and analysis constantly shapes the direction of research (Glaser, 2002). This section details the data collection methods I

utilized within this study, as shown in Table 2. The looped students comprised the primary data source; and the other students and teachers are utilized to provide additional context. The non-looped students served to provide context about the traditional experience, and teachers provide insights on the looped experience from their perspective

Table 2: Data collection timeline.

March 2017	April 2017	May 2017
Individual interviews -looped -non-looped -teachers	Follow up interviews -looped -non-looped -teachers	Member checking -looped -non-looped -teachers
Reflections (beginning 9th grade) -looped -non-looped	Reflections (end of 9th grade) -looped -non-looped	Reflections (beginning 10th grade English) -looped -non-looped
Collect documents	Document analysis	Document analysis

Individual, semi-structured interviews.

Data collection began with an intensive interview of each participant. For this research study, interviews were semi-structured, with a goal of learning about each student's relevant school experiences (Creswell, 2009). In these conversations, the participants from both groups were asked semi-structured questions comprised with words including the following to encourage the students' free response: explain, describe, why, how, tell, etc.; additionally, the interviewer checked for clarity and understanding with the participant as appropriate (Charmaz, 2010; Glesne, 2006). Some flexible questions were prepared ahead of time and used as needed in conjunction with natural and follow up questions or interviews as needed, and efforts to make participants

comfortable and unthreatened while maintaining the goals of the interview were made in choice of location, time, and duration of interviews (McMillan, 2008). See Appendix A for student interview questions.

Teachers of the looped classes were interviewed to share ideas about the looped experience. See Appendix B for teacher interview questions.

Written reflections.

Students from both groups were asked to reflect upon their feelings in writing from the beginning and end of the freshman year English experience (looped or non-looped English I). Later, all students were asked to reflect upon their non- looped English II experience and the feelings beginning a new class. These written reflections were collected and analyzed as data in this study. This served to provide additional insight into each student's experience (Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 1998). By examining the discourses utilized within documents, meaning was ascribed through the style, diction, contents, and presentation (Charmaz, 2010).

Archival educational data.

Archival educational data was collected and analyzed to allow the researcher to take note of any significant changes over time. Attendance, incident reports, and course grades were among the records utilized within this arena and provided insight regarding trends for individual students as well as groups of students. Consent and assent was provided by signed permission forms. Furthermore, this data allowed for reinforcement or additional information with regards to the interviews.

I remained open to other types of data as well. By considering varied interviews in addition to documented evidence, I strove to create a fair and accurate portrayal of the

student experience within both the looped and non-looped models of school scheduling based on the students' descriptions as well as written records. These could then be compared to provide a starting point for considerations of the ways in which alternative methods can be used to enhance or support current models to meet the needs of students.

Data Analysis Methods

Coding.

Initial coding began during the data collection phase and continued throughout the research process. Coding primarily utilized gerunds to show what a piece of text or dialogue is doing in addition to keeping codes short, precise, and simple (Charmaz, 2010; Ezzy, 2002). For the initial coding of interviews, line by line coding was employed to encourage critical, analytic examination of the data, which helped to determine what other types of data was useful (Holton, 2009). Constant comparative methods provided direction during the comparison of data to itself (an interview, for example), and then to other data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Themes were used as appropriate, based on participant language, to determine why, what, and how the interplay of situations could be examined (Charmaz, 2010). For coding of documents, the procedure was similar, but information was chunked as the same themes occurred (Holton, 2009). After these coding incidents had taken place, focused examination of the codes for the most frequently occurring or interesting ones provided areas of focus moving forward; these served as points of analysis, though the process was constantly evolving (Ezzy, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Research notes or memos were taken during and after this process to make the emerging themes and ideas clear and help determine which concepts were truly worthy of further development and how they potentially related to each other. Focus was

on academic experiences (grades, perceived successes or failures, learning outcomes, etc) and social development (relationships with students, faculty, school, or community). Special attention was paid to changes over time.

Triangulation of data.

Throughout my study, I incorporated interviews which were analyzed for themes by case, text analysis of student reflective writing, teacher interviews, and archival educational data (including attendance, incident reports, and course grades). Using different forms of data and students from differing perspectives allowed for methodological confirmation of information and deeper understanding of the data (Maxwell, 2013). Data triangulation was utilized in the form of checking back with the students to ensure that data were both transcribed and interpreted appropriately according to their memory and meaning (Ezzy, 2002).

Researcher Positionality

I served as the researcher for this study. Involvement included identifying and interviewing participants, collecting related documents, and analyzing the data. Examples included student work samples, anecdotal information, and school demographic information, etc. This study falls into the category of backyard research, research at one's "own institution or agency" with whom a pre-existing relationship exists (Glesne, 2006). This was appropriate because I have established rapport with prospective participants in my workplace and access was easily granted. Glesne (2006) explains that since there are both advantages and disadvantages to conducting this type of research, and ethical considerations must be made in order to assure appropriateness and reliability of research. Due to my position as a teacher in the school to be utilized for this

study, I strove to be careful and reliable with data collection. I decided that the benefits of having ready access to data outweighed potential difficulties from using this site (Glesne, 2006).

My research has several connections to my personal life and experience. First of all, as a teacher, I would like to believe that the more time and energy I put into students, the greater impact I will have/have had. I am quite interested in learning if this is, indeed, true as well as whether or not at-risk high school students themselves agree with this theory based on their own experiences.

I have had a great deal of varied classroom compositions and other situations in my past and current experiences as both a student and teacher. Personally, as a student, I benefitted from having teachers I had before, as it provided a sense of familiarity and connection. Furthermore, for the same reasons, as a teacher I prefer working with students I have already taught and, therefore, bonded with, or even those that I know through clubs or other activities. As a teacher, I am prepared to advocate for whatever is best for my students, whether it be repeating teachers or always having new ones. I hope to gain more knowledge with student input into this concept while conducting this study.

Additionally, as this research took place at the school I work at, this could be viewed as a conflict of interest. I, however, see this as having a particularly interesting insight into the school and community atmosphere. Additionally, I was not actually involved in the loop (nor did I want to be), so I have nothing at stake personally or professionally with regards to potential findings.

Risks, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

For anonymity and participant privacy, all participants received an alias to be used during interpretation or discussion of analysis, as did any teachers or others named in participant responses. Participants were asked to sign assent and consent forms before participating in the research, and they were additionally allowed to review their responses both before and after analysis. Risks to individual participants were not anticipated, as students were merely reflecting on past experiences and attitudes. Benefits to future students and teachers are noted, as actions can follow the results regarding the scheduling of at-risk students in high schools.

Strategies for Quality.

Member checking was utilized in order to help ensure logical and sound analysis of data. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to review data and/or analysis for accuracy and clarity purposes. Students were able to view transcripts of their interviews, see associated themes, and make comments as they deemed appropriate. Constant comparative analysis was employed throughout the process, and relevant literature was consulted and incorporated as appropriate after analysis, giving the study a firmer analytical foundation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Limitations to Study.

Limitations to the study include generalizability, since the participants were from only one school site, the school at which I work, and since the study only examined the English loop and block scheduling. The small number of participants also provides limitations in this way. As with man qualitative studies, this study did not predict causality, it simply discussed the experiences of student participants as they perceived it.

Conclusion

This study strove to provide fodder for further examination of the looping concept and its expansion to the high school level as a potential intervention for students at-risk for dropping out.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter describes perspectives of students who participated in an English I looped class; that is, students who were with the same teacher and class all year during 9th grade across two consecutive courses: in Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) in the fall and then in English I in the spring. Specifically, the analysis in this chapter uses data to home in on student behavioral and academic experiences as described by the participants through interviews and written reflections as well as through examining academic data. Student behavior includes positive and negative interactions of students in school or communities, encompassing discipline, attendance, etc. Academic experiences are those that influence a student's learning process and school achievement**.** Before a description of the categories, information is provided as an overview about each student's background as well as his or her scheduling situation to give the reader a better understanding of the student experience. First, I discuss students who did not participate in a looped class, but who were considered by the school to be similar academically to the looped students in this study who were all identified as at-risk. This will serve to provide context of a more traditional student experience within the school. After data have been discussed including both students' perspectives and input from teachers, the section concludes with a brief comparison between student descriptions of the learning experience within both looped and non-looped groups. Analysis is then provided to explore how looped scheduling may shapes student experiences, both academically and socially.

Study Description

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of at-risk students who participated in a looping program for academic support during their ninth-grade year. The experiences of students from both looped and non-looped scenarios were used within this qualitative case study in which the students themselves served as the unit of analysis for the following questions:

1. How do high school students describe their experiences in looped English classes?
2. How does the looping method of scheduling English classes affect high school students academically and socially?

Students from both looped and non-looped groups were included within this study; the looped students served as the cases for analysis, and the non-looped students were used to provide background information and serve as points of comparison. The students utilized in this study were classified as at-risk by the school's graduation committee because their history while in middle school included some of the following: academic struggles (failing a class or receiving unsatisfactory end-of-grade test scores), behavioral problems (as evidenced by multiple discipline referrals), and attendance issues (a higher-than-average incidence of absences and/or tardies). Additionally, recommendations from eighth grade teachers made these students a priority for extra monitoring. Test scores and teacher recommendations were integral factors for determining which of these students were placed in the loop and which were placed into a traditional one-semester English I class.

The first group discussed was comprised of the non-looped group. All the students in this case had similar backgrounds to their looped counterparts, but they were placed only in English I with no additional foundational support. Most of the students chosen for this study were in a section of English I taught by either Mrs. N or Mrs. R to help control for disparities based on teacher. Jake and Sam had Mrs. R for English I; Jake also had her for English II, but Sam did not. Anna had Mrs. N for English I, and then wound up in Mrs. R's English II class. Maria had a different teacher, Mrs. A, for English I, but then had Mrs. N for English II. Maria and Sam are twins.

The two teachers involved in this study provided additional insight into the happenings of both types of classrooms. Descriptions of the teachers are included to provide their background, experience, and thoughts on the looped and non-looped experiences. Both teachers have experience teaching traditional block classes as well as looped classes, and both teachers discussed their observations of each type of scheduling scenario.

The focus group was comprised of students who did participate in a looped English class during their 9th grade year. These students completed a foundational class called Strategic Reading and Writing during their first semester of high school and remained with the same group of students as well as the same teacher during the second semester for English I. There were two sections of this loop during the year the students in this study were freshmen, so looped participants could have been in either Mrs. R's class all year or Mrs. N's class all year for English. Mrs. N had taught Strategic Reading and Writing several times over the previous decade and had received training from John Hopkins University to do so. Mrs. R had never taught the Strategic Reading and Writing

class prior to this group, and she had received no additional formal training to do so. Looped students in this study who were in Mrs. N's class all year were Harley, Amanda, and Caleb. Both Harley and Amanda were also in Mrs. N's non-looped class for English II, while Caleb had a different teacher for English II. Gary was in Mrs. R's Strategic Reading and Writing and English I loop and then had her again for English II.

The individual participant data that follow are organized into groups: the students who had not participated in the loop of Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) and English I during their freshman year, the teachers of the looped Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) and English I class and non-looped English I sections, and the students who did participate in the loop by taking Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) in the fall semester and continuing to English I with the same class and teachers in the spring semester. Each will be followed by discussion of this group. (See Table 3.)

Table 3: Data Display

Student	Mrs. R	Mrs. N	Other
Harley		SRW, Eng I, Eng II	
Amanda		SRW, Eng I, Eng II	
Caleb		SRW, Eng I	Eng II
Gary	SRW, Eng I, Eng II		
Jake	Eng I, Eng II		
Sam	Eng I		Eng II
Maria		Eng II	Eng I
Anna	Eng II	Eng I	

Traditionally-Scheduled Students

Students in this group were deemed at-risk by the graduation committee due to the presence of the aforementioned academic, attendance, and behavioral issues as well as the recommendations of their eighth-grade teachers. However, they were not placed in the ninth grade English loop, either because their previous teachers thought it would not significantly benefit them, because they did not meet the academic levels required based on standardized test scores, or because of scheduling issues. They were scheduled, either fall or spring semester, randomly by computer into any section of regular English I that was not one of the loops. They did not have the same small cohort or a repeating teacher that their looped peers had. Their English class could have been scheduled at any point in the day. What follows is a discussion of each individual non-looped student, incorporating all of the available data: student interviews, written reflections, and school data, as appropriate. Each student's own words are noted by the use of italics as well as quotation marks. Additionally, teacher interviews were incorporated as necessary to support student points. A brief discussion of this data then follows.

Jake.

Jake was a 17-year-old junior at the time of this study. He was in a different situation than the other participants: he is a non-looped participant; however, he did have the same teacher for a traditional block English I Honors and then English II (general education), Ms. R. At the time of the study, he was a junior, and he had the benefit of a different teacher for English III (regular), Mr. G, as well. He came highly recommended by Ms. R and he was very excited to participate, which is why he was included in this study.

Jake saw himself as a regular, hard-working guy and painted this portrait of himself in an interview: *"I think others see me as reliable because I know I help a lot of people with their problems. If they need help, they usually come to me. They see me a little bit as intelligent because people are always asking me for homework and stuff like that, so um, I'm just an average high schooler, I guess you could say."* Of all the student participants, Jake had the most clear-cut vision for his future: he explained in both interviews and written reflections that he wants to "*become an anesthesiologist after attending a large state university*." He explained in an interview that he has explored the admission requirements and scholarship options thoroughly and understood what he needs to do to make his goals happen.

Jake said in written reflections that he felt he had grown a great deal since middle school. He said in interviews that he "*matured emotionally"* and socially from "*the awkward"* pre-teen he once was, getting in the occasional mix-up or a little trouble. He said in an interview that at the time of the study he rarely got reprimanded, citing "*responsible actions and good decisions*." He expressed in an interview a belief that a change in peer group, coupled with natural maturation, deserves the credit for this improvement, and explained his realization about friends and peer pressure in an interview: *"I've noticed you really are who you are based on who you hang out with and I know a lot of people said in middle school 'be careful who you hang out with'. And everyone was like 'nah, it doesn't matter,' but then you get to high school and you realize, 'okay, these people are not very responsible and their grades show they're not very intelligent and I don't want to be with those people 'cause I don't want to be seen as that.'"*

As far as academic progress was concerned, Jake described his problems in the majority of his classes thus in an interview: "*Um, I get distracted very easily, so I know in some of my classes I'd get in trouble a little bit because I'm talkative and once you get me going, I just can't stop. Haha."*

Jake switched tracks during his high school career: he started in honors, completed two years of regular, and then returned to an honors English class for his senior year, which he said in an interview he thought was in his best interest to meet his long-term college goals. Not many students in this high school switched like this; typically, they stayed in the track they begin in (honors or standard). Some may switch once if they find the work to be too hard or too easy, but few switch back again later. He explained in an interview how he sees the difference between the two levels as a student: *"Um, I feel like going from honors in 9th grade and switching to regular, things weren't as difficult but you're still held to a certain standard. Um, like honors you'd have to write a two-page paper, then regular you'd write a half a sheet of paper, but they both had, you know, the same requirements, it's just different lengths so I feel like honors you were being prepared more for something like college….and regular it was just more like getting the credits done."* Jake said in an interview that he had quite a good relationship with his English I and II teacher, Ms. R, who he described as his "*friend*." He was able to articulate in an interview differences in her teaching style for the different academic levels by saying this: *"Well, I can see how much she'd stress upon honors students rather than the regular. Like, with honors it was more like she's laid back, and it was more common core where you'd kind of have to figure it out on your own. And then with regular, we were guided a lot more*" by the teacher.

Jake said in an interview that his troubles in school occurred mostly in elementary school and stemmed from comprehension problems due to being "*bored"* and "*distracted*." *"Well, like so when I'm reading a passage, like I said before, I'll often doze off and I'll get distracted easily, so I'll just be looking at the passage but not thinking about it...and a lot of times I'm just not interested in the subject, so that's what causes me to doze off."* Classes like his Advanced Placement Psychology class, even though a more advanced level, were easier for him to complete the reading in because it was something in which he "*was interested*," he explained in an interview.

Though Jake reported in an interview having a strong relationship with Mr. G once the semester was underway, he said when he saw a teacher other than Ms. R, he "*felt stressed*," explaining that he *"freaked out a little bit... Uh, because I was very comfortable with Ms. R, so and then this kinda forced me out of my comfort zone. Cause I didn't know much about this guy. And most of my friends are in honors and most of their friends are in honors, so I couldn't really ask anyone about him. So it was just walking into something completely different."* Though Jake explained both in an interview and in a written reflection that it would "*be more comfortable"* to have one of the teachers he already knew and was familiar with, he questioned in an interview if this was the best long-term decision for him, especially with his eye on the future. *"I'm trying to get out of my comfort zone and expand a little bit more cause if I'm in my comfort zone now, then college is gonna be- it's gonna be a bad ride."*

Anna.

Anna was age 16 and a sophomore at the time of this study. She did not participate in a looped class and, outside of yearbook, did not have the same teacher

twice in her academic career. She had teachers who do teach looping classes both years, however, as she was in Ms. N's class in 9th grade and Ms. R's class in 10th.

Anna explained in an interview that she typically did well in school, having made straight A's many times. This is supported by school data and transcripts. She said in an interview that she generally "*enjoys learning"*and "*is well-liked"* by students and staff alike. She explained in an interview that the challenges she faced were more social and/or emotional in nature, as she tends to doubt herself. Anna described her greatest struggle in an interview as *"Probably it's not challenging myself to reach my full potential."* Potential and the idea of being good enough are things that "*often worried"* Anna, as she wrote in a reflection. This seemed to be why, even though she was recommended for several different honors classes throughout high school (as confirmed by school records), she decided to stick with regular classes, where she explained in an interview she "*has more confidence"* in her ability "*to be successful*."

Anna described her relationships with her English teacher in an interview as *varied*. During her freshman year, Anna said in an interview that she had "*no* particularly *strong feelings"* about her teacher either "*good or bad*," and she described their relationship as *"mutual*," explaining that she feels this way because *"well, because I respected her as my teacher, but we did not have a connection other than that."*

Anna described her sophomore year more positively in an interview, explaining that *"this year it was more full of trust and respect, and so I was willing to ask her for help in areas I struggled in... we just kind of clicked more, you know. From the beginning*." This relationship could be responsible for her increased enjoyment of the course, saying she "*liked it much better"* than English I. As she reflected, Anna

articulated that "*I connected with my teacher more, so I got more out of her class"* even though her grades in the two courses were similar, as evidenced by school data.

Maria.

Maria was a 16-year-old sophomore at the time this study was conducted. She did not have the experience of being in a looped class, nor had her twin brother, who is the next student to be discussed. Maria said in an interview that she struggles with reading comprehension, but she also explained that she "*works hard in all her classes*." She was known within the school community for "*maintaining a positive attitude"* all the time, according to a teacher participant. Maria described herself in a written reflection as *"a hard worker and tries my very best at everything I do"* and has "*challenged herself"* by taking some honors courses in high school, which she explained that she "*never pictured herself doing*."

Maria described her relationship with her English I teacher, Ms. A., as "*somewhat challenging*." She said that Ms. A "*pushed me to do my very best but it was hard sometimes for all the reading passages"* and that their relationship was "*a good one*." She noted in her interview that "*she was a good teacher, and I enjoyed having her. I think she liked having me* too...*because she was always excited to see me."* Her English grade was higher in English I than English II as evidenced by school report cards, which she attributed in an interview to "*more reading comprehension"* work within the latter course. However, she said in the interview that she enjoyed English II as well, and that she experienced great "*success during that semester*," as she "*passed all her final exams*." Maria said in an interview that she felt "*connected"* to her English II teacher, and described their relationship as *close. "At moments in class she didn't seem like a*

teacher, she seem like a mother...because she taught us life lessons from our books and called our class her children." Maria stated in an interview that she would prefer to have either of these teachers again, as she *"already knows what to expect and would feel comfortable*."

Sam.

Sam is the twin brother of Maria, so he was also 16 and a sophomore during the time of this study. Sam said in an interview that he tends to be more academically inclined and described himself as "*intelligent*." He explained in an interview that he generally does well in school, though he does experience some academic "*anxiety*," especially when it comes to high-stakes or "*end-of-course testing*."

Sam did not participate in a loop or have the same teacher. For English I, he had Ms. R, and for English II, he had me. He was on the honors track, and typically did quite well in class, as evidenced school records. When asked about his relationships with his teachers, Sam noted in an interview that his English I teacher and he shared *"a regular teacher and student relationship*" even though the thought of English class causes him some "*nervousness*." He explained in an interview that "*English is not his best subject*," as Sam had more of a penchant for math and science. According to school records, he did well in his academic classes as well as extracurriculars like sports, and he credited these accomplishments in an interview with "*building his confidence"* and leading to "*more continued success*."

With regards to English II, Sam said in written reflections that he preferred this class and teacher. He reported in an interview that having "*a prior relationship"* with his teacher helped build a bond that transferred to the classroom: *"My relationship with my*

English teacher this year was like better because I knew her as a person and not just a teacher...we knew each other from before I was in her class and we can joke around and stuff." Sam explicated in an interview that the prior knowledge helped him to "*feel more comfortable from the beginning"* of the semester, even though he was not extremely keen on English class. With regards to moving forward, Sam expressed in both an interview and a reflection experiencing some trepidation about a "*new English class next year*, as it will be at the *Advanced Placement level in the subject area with which he said he feels least confident."*

Non-looped Discussion.

This section focuses on topics of note found within the data of the students who were not looped. Interviews of two teachers who have experience teaching both looped and non-looped classes, Catherine and Sherry, are additionally referenced within this section to add additional insight and to provide triangulation. My goal here is to provide context regarding the experience of students deemed at risk who are on a traditional schedule in the school.

Many of these students mentioned experiencing some anxiety during transitional periods of high school: when they first entered high school and before their sophomore year. Several mentioned concerns about their English classes in general and noted that English (or reading) is "*not my best subject."*

Many students in this group discussed their academic achievements and an increase in self-efficacy as their high school careers progressed. Maria mentioned in an interview that, even though she was nervous at the beginning, *"now my grades are better.*

A lot... because I have had teachers and they prepared me a lot more" and that she was able to excel more than ever before on her final exams and passed them all for the semester. These students tended to mention something about having to challenge themselves more than teachers challenging them.

These students also seemed to gain self-confidence as they moved through high school: *"I think as I got better and or like learned more I got some more confidence;" "I got more confidence, self-confidence in myself;" and "I've done well in my classes and that makes confidence*" are their comments regarding self-esteem from interviews.

Interestingly, many of these students mentioned participating in extracurricular activities or clubs that contributed to positive self-esteem. Anna and Maria both noted gaining confidence from their involvement with Yearbook, where they had to step outside of their normal "*comfort zones."* Anna became "*a leader"* of her peers in this situation, and Maria had to go out in the "*community"* to sell ads, as well as put her writing on display for the whole school. Sam mentioned "*leadership"* in his interview as well, a skill he said he gained from being involved in "*athletics and band."* As Catherine, a teacher, noted, students who have a more traditional schedule have to "*find their own way within a structure"* that is quite different from that of middle school. This seemed to ring true for these students who sought extracurricular activities to help them gain confidence and belonging within the school community.

Anna, Jake, and Maria all noted that they are more mature now than they were in middle school or even in their 9th grade years. Jake said in an interview that if we had met in middle school, I would have encountered someone who was *"uh, immature definitely. Overweight because of the growing periods. I was more of an awkward child.*

You know, socially awkward," but he described his current self at the time of the study as *"now...I'm matured, and I guess you could say I'm a lot better with common sense now."* While Anna has always been well-behaved, she described herself as having matured since high school, and Maria considered herself to be a mature student now.

When asked to describe their relationships with their teachers all of these students had generally positive things to say. They described their relationships with their 9th grade, English I teachers as "*fine"* and that there was mutual respect between student and teacher. However, interestingly, all seemed to prefer their English teacher during their sophomore years. Anna explained in an interview that her English II teacher, *"just clicked with her*," so she felt she gained more from the class. Sam agreed, saying in an interview that his English II teacher was better*: "My relationship with my English teacher this year was like better because I knew her as a person and not just a teacher...because we knew each other from before I was in her class and we can joke around and stuff*" and he enjoyed that class more. Maria, too, enjoyed her English II course more and explained in an interview that she felt a "*stronger"* relationship. While her English I teacher *"pushed me to do my very best*" and was described in an interview as a "*good teacher"* who Maria "*enjoyed having*;" her relationship with her English II teacher *"felt like family."* It is interesting that all three of these students who had no repeated teacher preferred the second one, even though they had different experiences with different teachers. Perhaps they were more comfortable with these teachers because they were more comfortable within the school environment. When asked if they would have a teacher again, all three of these students said yes. "*Because I already know them*

and like that they will help me and stuff," said Maria in an interview, *"and how to do the reading comprehension!"*

Teachers

Teacher interviews were included in this study to provide triangulation and add an additional perspective to the discussion on effects of traditionally scheduled and looped classes for at-risk students. Background on the teachers, as well as some of their ideas about different types of English I classes, follows.

Catherine.

Catherine was a 17-year veteran English teacher at the time of this study. She has taught all of these years at the school utilized in this study and has taught Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW), English I (regular and inclusion), English II (regular, honors, pre-AP, and inclusion), English IV (regular, honors, and inclusion), and Advanced Placement Literature. She used to teach Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) as a stand-alone, one semester course. The students, placed for deficits in reading and writing skills, would take this class in the fall and would then be randomly placed in second-semester English I classes taught by anyone, mixed in with all of the other English I regular students.

During the 2008-2009 school year, the school participated in a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University and sent Catherine and one other teacher to training. The study involved providing materials (primarily high-interest/low- level novels, nonfiction texts, and novel guides), strategies and support to meet the needs of struggling readers. One of the requirements of this study was that the teachers have contact with these students all year, so the school decided that the most feasible solution was to loop the

SRW class into English I with the same teacher. Catherine said she "*greatly prefers teaching SRW in a looped format*," as she feels it *"builds relationships between students, teacher(s), school, family, and community and sets the students up to experience increased academic success."*

Sherry.

Sherry is a fourth-year teacher who had taught English I at the time of this study (regular, inclusion, and honors) and English II (regular, inclusion, and honors). Three of these years have been at the school used in this study. The students of the class being discussed in this study comprise the only time she has taught the Strategic Reading and Writing, and it was looped into English I. Sherry has received no formal training in SRW outside of her school-based Professional Learning Community. The materials and resources provided by the John Hopkins study were available to her, however.

Sherry said she was apprehensive about teaching this class and having the same students all year and connecting with each of these students as individuals. By the end, she saw both benefits and detriments. *"On the positive side, those students who wanted to improve in a 'safe' environment were able to do so for both the Strategic Reading course and English I"* and they could maintain any momentum they established during SRW the following semester. On the reverse side, Sherry explains that students chosen to participate in the SRW and English I loop should be selected carefully: "*the negative is that some of the students placed in these classes should not have been due to behavior issues...Dealing with those students for a whole year can be hard on a teacher. In that instance, we both would have benefited from a change."* She says that administration needs to look seriously at each potential candidate's history: class grades, test scores,

disciplinary incidents, and teacher recommendations, selecting only those students who are struggling with reading comprehension and writing. Students whose problems stem less from academics and more from the social or behavioral side should be excluded, she asserts, so that the class can "*focus on building skills and not maintaining order*."

Looped Students

Students in this group were in one of two year-long sections of English I during their freshman year. Each of these sections met during first period all year. The first semester was a Strategic Reading and Writing (SRW) class, designed to build foundational skills that may be lacking in at-risk students who were identified by the school's graduation team. The second semester was English I. The class remained intact throughout the year. Additionally, this group looped together for Foundations of Math and Math 1 as well, so they were together for half of both the school day and academic year. What follows is a discussion of each individual looped student, incorporating all available data: student interviews, written reflections, and school data as appropriate. Additionally, teacher interviews are incorporated as necessary to support student points. A thematic analysis of this data is then included.

Harley.

Harley was in Mrs. N's looped English I class with the same group of students throughout her freshman year. Additionally, she was placed back in Mrs. N's class for English II, but with different classmates.

Harley is a 17-year old sophomore who participated in the looped group as a freshman for both English I and Math I, so she had two teachers all year and was with the

same group of students for half of the school day and year. Furthermore, she was placed back with her freshman English I teacher for English II as well (with a different class).

During an interview, Harley described herself as a *"decent, hard-working student"* who has had some struggles in the past, particularly with reading. Harley verbally explained that she was diagnosed with dyslexia in first grade, and she thinks this probably contributed to her repeating kindergarten. Additionally, she mentioned that she has experienced some upheaval in her personal life, explaining that she moved to live with her aunt and uncle in elementary school and later reconnecting with her mother and father. She said she feels that she had to "*mature faster because her parents work late,"* and she is responsible for the well-being of her younger brothers, ages 10 and 6, for long periods of time after school each day.

Harley's academic struggles are primarily related to reading. She explained in an interview, "*the hardest thing is like just reading - the actual reading- for me. Like rereading the text and finding my answers in the text and just like studying*." She noted improvement with reading and writing both in written reflections and in her interview, and her grades support this, as she has grown in terms of both letter grades (as documented on her transcript) and EVAAS data.

Harley said she "*has never really been in trouble"* and reported that she has "*a lot of friends*," though she sometimes feels out of place from her peers since she is older due to being held back in kindergarten. School records indicate that she had an unblemished discipline record, and notations from her kindergarten teacher describe Harley as "hardworking and polite, yet increasingly behind in terms of word- and letter-recognition

skills". The teacher suggested an extra year in kindergarten would likely build these skills and help Harley to become more "academically successful."

When she first entered high school, Harley said she "*felt nervous*." She expressed this both during interviews and within her written reflections: as the oldest sibling in her family, she had no one to tell her what to expect from high school. While participating in the loop, Harley was with the same students for half of the school day, which she said in an interview helped her to "*feel more comfortable"* in high school. Shortly after entering the English loop, Harley said in an interview that she realized her mom and her English teacher already knew each other. It was soon after that when she and her teacher *"got a stronger relationship and like, her daughter and I started becoming like...like kind of like family I guess."* She mentioned being happy to return to Ms. N, the English teacher, yet again for sophomore year since, "*I know how she teaches and how I need to prepare myself for her class already."* In fact, after three semesters together, she described in a written reflection having a feeling of confidence to go on to a new teacher for English III, since, as mentioned in an interview, she knew that *"she's {the teacher has} told me I can come to her house and she can help me and stuff if I need it,"* attesting to the strong, self-proclaimed family-like relationship between student and teacher.

While Harley had the same English teacher for her freshman and sophomore years, she had different teachers for math her freshman (2015-2016) and sophomore years (2016-2017), after looping with Ms. E last year. She said she felt that the year-long class allowed her to bond with this teacher as well, explaining in an interview that her new math teacher is supportive of maintaining the relationship: *"I like Ms. E. better, but like with her since we had each other the whole year last time she's told me I can come to*

her. And there's been a couple times I told my teacher I didn't understand what he was talking about, could I go talk to Ms. E and he said yeah" and Harley said she felt she was able to get the help she needed that way.

If Harley had the option to do it over again, she explained in an interview that she would recommend participating in the looped group because *"it's fun getting to know everyone and having the same teacher."*

Amanda.

Amanda was a 17-year-old sophomore who participated in the looped group as a freshman for both English I and Math I, so she had two teachers all year and was with the same group of students for half of the school day and year. Furthermore, she was placed back with her freshman English I teacher for English II as well (with a different class).

Amanda explained in an interview that she sees herself as someone who "*works hard all the time*." She mentioned in an interview that this is a contrast to how she was in middle school because she was rather apathetic about school in the past. School records supported this idea with notations about missing assignments and sloppy work. She described her behavior as less-than-stellar and said she did not pay attention or complete her work and that she was often rude to her teachers in middle school. Now, she described herself in an interview as a student who has experienced an epiphany sometime during the summer between middle and high school: *"I noticed how my grades were failing and I knew I wouldn't be able to be what I wanted to be when I grew up*" (a nurse, which Amanda knew would require a four-year degree). One thing she did to facilitate this change was to begin to advocate for herself and use the looped class to her advantage. When she began to feel behind, Amanda explained in an interview that she

"*told my teacher that I have struggled in the past and she told me that she would make sure that she would help me the best that she could to make me pass. And in the past teachers, they didn't. They didn't even really try to help*." Together, Amanda told the interviewer that she and Ms. N decided that *"if I didn't understand it the first semester than I could get it the second semester."*

Amanda reported in both interviews and written reflections that reading has been her main area of difficulty, and her English/ Language Arts grades have traditionally been among the lowest for Amanda. She said in an interview that she has *"learned more strategies"* to aid in her reading comprehension and had time to master them with continued support of Ms. N for three semesters. *"I remember mostly what I learned last year. More than I - than I think I would have remembered if it was just one time."* She wrote in a reflection that she has even "*used these strategies to help with reading in other content classes*," like science.

In an interview, Amanda reported feeling *excited* when she saw that she had Ms. N again. Starting school (particularly English) was *"a lot better because I wasn't scared of this year like I was last year. I was worried that I was gonna get picked on in high school. I was more worried what people would think than grades last year....so this year I was like- I felt relieved because whenever I got in there, I knew it was gonna be okay and I was gonna do well as long as I could, like, focus on school."* The continued exposure seems to have helped with reading, since school reports showed that Amanda made a B for the first time ever in English II. However, Amanda said in a reflection that she had *some nervous feelings* about the impending new teacher for English III next year. She explained in an interview, *"I'm nervous that the school work might be harder or that she-*

a new teacher may not care or she may not be able to help me. I mean, I'm scared that she won't know me or I might not be able to connect with her and I'll have to like, start over." She told the interviewer that she liked being in the looped class and would recommend it to other students like her: *"I think I would tell them to go ahead and do it. It would be a better understanding for him and the work, I think it would be easier for him to remember stuff that the teacher has taught."*

Gary.

Gary was a 16-year old sophomore who participated in the looped group as a freshman for both English I and Math I, so he had two teachers all year and was with the same group of students for half of the school day and year. Furthermore, he was placed back with his freshman English I teacher for English II as well (with a different class).

Gary described himself in an interview as an "*all-around nice guy*, a *well-behaved"* and "*mannerly"* student. He told me that he excelled in track and held a job doing landscaping. In school, he said in an interview that he does well in class, but he "*struggles with tests"* and bigger assignments. For example, school data showed that his standardized test scores were often lower than his grades and class average. He explained during an interview, "*if we have school work, like homework and stuff I can do and in class work I can do and I can get like 90s and 80s and 100s on that. And then when it comes to the test, I just cannot remember anything. Like at all. I just forget everything. So I just can't do good on any test like, at all...I think one reason's cause I'm so nervous. And I don't know if the other reason's cause of my dyslexia...and I have to take the medicine for it [the dyslexia], so I don't know if it's part of that too."* Gary reported in an interview being diagnosed with dyslexia in second grade. In middle school, he explained

in an interview, his doctors and parents decided to try using medication to mitigate this condition. He said in an interview that he typically used "*a patch"* to help control his symptoms, and he explicated that this helps him a lot. Written reflections reiterated this idea. In addition to the dyslexia, Gary explained in an interview that he suffers from *a stutter* that hinders his oral reading: *"I'm not very confident about my reading at all. I stutter, and I get really nervous about getting in front of people and having to read and stuff. But, like I always, I noticed that I read about 3 or 4 words at a time then I stutter a little bit, and then I go read 3 or 4 and then I'll stutter and then every now and then I'll read like a whole two sentences perfect."* In both written reflection and an interview, he described reading comprehension as his biggest learning challenge.

When high school started, Gary was placed in the looped English I class, and he had the same teacher for English II as well, Ms. R. Gary reported in an interview that he "*really likes"* having the same teacher over again *"cause it's like still learning how to teach from the same way instead of going to a different teacher that teaches a different way. Like, teachers teach different ways from other teachers, so I like having the same teacher*." He described his relationship with Ms. R in an interview as being *"really good and comfortable"*, so he was *excited* when he saw he had her again for English II. As he said during an interview, *"I was actually kinda excited cause I knew that she'd put me to work and stuff and not just get it easy and like just let me pass but she sees that I try and stuff and whenever she sees that I'm struggling, she helps me out. Other teachers won't see that, but Ms. R knows me now... She's a really nice person outside of school and a really good teacher too."*

Gary reported getting into a "*fair amount"* of trouble in middle school during an interview; several citations found in school records include talking back, disruptive behavior, and insubordination. He said in an interview that he has since made new friends who are "*more supportive and are a more positive influence than the people he hung out with in middle school*."

Gary noted in an interview that he had experienced improvement in his grade averages overall as well until very recently, when his medication got switched. *"Right after the first semester I had A's, B's, C's, and not a single D. But that was one of my first times not having a D on my report card and I think it was almost A/B honor roll. I think I was maybe a point away from having A/B honor roll. But now, I have two classes I have to go to study hall for. They're like 71 and I think a 74. I think it's from math and English."* Students at this school who were earning less than a 75 average in any class were required to attend a remediation session during school at least once a week until the grade is over 75. A grade of 60 or above is considered passing.

While he was close to Ms. R and told the interviewer that he often visited with her in her classroom to talk basketball and regional sports rivalries, he also said he wishes he had not been in the year-long loop during his freshman year. *"Um, I really do like the one semester better cause I realized when I was taking the strategic English I that it didn't really count as like a class credit, so I'd rather go ahead and just take the English I and get it over with and get the class credit instead of taking the class and not getting the credit for it.*" (To clarify, the students did receive an elective credit for the strategic Fall semester in the year-long loop; however, they also still had to take the required English I,

II, III, and IV.) He wrote in a reflection that he would like to continue having "*the same teacher for required courses"* as he completes his high school journey.

When asked if there was anything else he'd like to add at the conclusion of the interview, Gary stressed his relationship with his teachers, suggesting that it would be nice to have the co-teacher from his math class go with the students to separate setting "*since he would better know how to help the students"* than a person who was not in the class and was solely dedicated to the testing lab.

Caleb.

At the time of this study, Caleb was a 15-year-old sophomore who participated in the looped group as a freshman for both English I and Math I, so he had two teachers all year and was with the same group of students for half of the school day and year. However, he had a new teacher for English II his sophomore year. (For the sake of full disclosure, that teacher was me, the researcher.)

As a student, Caleb said in an interview that he tried *pretty hard*. He described himself as quiet but friendly and explained that he strives to get all of his work completed and make good grades. He said in a written reflection that his main struggle was *succeeding on tests*. He elaborated during an interview: "*It seems like if it's a test, it seems like I forget. It could be {nervousness}, but it just seems like everything just slips my mind."*

Caleb expressed contentment within the looped classes during his ninth-grade year in both his interview and written reflection. When asked in an interview about the relationship with his teacher he said simply, *"She liked me and I liked her and I never got*

in trouble or anything like that." As for the students he was with for half of the school day he said in an interview that, *"some kids was all right. Some others I had to get used to. I had some friends in there."* Over the summer, Caleb explained in an interview that his schedule placed him back in class with Ms. N; however, on the first day of school, he saw that "*it had changed"* and he "*had a new teacher*." He expressed nervousness in an interview because "*he did not know the new teacher*," but he wrote in a reflection that it turned out "*okay in the end"* and the relationship "*was good*."

In middle school, Caleb got into some trouble; in an interview, he reported getting sent out of class *"all the time*." Caleb reported in the interview that he no longer has these kinds of problems in class, a point which is supported by school disciplinary records.

Caleb reported in an interview that his grades have improved substantially since middle school; report cards show primarily C's from that time. He said in an interview that he "*didn't really try"* in middle school and that he "*could have done better*." For reading assignments then, he said in an interview, *"I most of the time would look it up online. I didn't even like try."* For the first time, he said in the interview, he "*started to read a little bit more, like when I get a book project. I'll actually read it and try,"* and he read a Chris Crutcher book he really liked for self-selected reading in English during his sophomore year. When asked about writing in the interview, he became more enthusiastic: *"I've gotten a lot better at writing. Looking at papers from like middle school and then 9th grade to 10th grade, it's gotten a lot better*."

When asked about preparing for another new English teacher next year during the interview, Caleb said he felt confident. *"Well, I feel a little bit better because I was nervous when I seen that I had a new one [for English II] and it wasn't, I mean, it wasn't*

bad, so…." However, he expressed during the interview a preference for "*the year-long class*," as he said he feels like he *can get used to the teacher and feel more comfortable"* with both the teacher and students. He said during the interview that he "*would recommend"* participating in a looped class to other students like him if they have a choice for those reasons and would prefer repeating having a previous teacher over a new one in any subject.

Looped Students Discussion.

This section focuses on topics of note found within the data of the students who were looped. Table 4 (below) provides an overview of these students and related themes. Interviews of two teachers who have experience teaching both looped and non-looped classes, Catherine and Sherry, are additionally referenced within this section to provide triangulation.

Table 4: Thematic Display

Student	Themes
Harley	Relationships • *…kind of like family I guess.* • *It's fun getting to know everyone and having the same teacher.* Academics • Improvement Confidence • *I feel confident*
Amanda	Relationships • *In the past teachers, they didn't. They didn't even really try to help….but Mrs. N did* Academics • *I remember mostly what I learned last year. More than I - than I think I would have remembered if it was just one time…*She has *used these strategies to help with reading in other content classes* Behavior • *I noticed how my grades were failing and I knew I wouldn't be able to be what I wanted to be when I grew up* so she started to focus more on school and less on impressing others Self-efficacy • *I felt relieved because whenever I got in there, I knew it was gonna be okay and I was gonna do well*

Caleb	Relationships • *She liked me and I liked her and I never got in trouble or anything* Academics • *I've gotten a lot better at writing. Looking at papers from like middle school…to 10th grade, it's gotten a lot better.* Behavior • *In middle school, I got in trouble a lot more. I was a lot more immature.* Self-efficacy • *I get used to the teacher and... feel comfortable*
Gary	Relationships • *I was actually kinda excited cause I knew that she'd put me to work...she sees that I try and stuff and whenever she sees that I'm struggling, she helps me out. Other teachers won't see that, but Ms. R knows me now.* Academics • *Now I'll read like a whole two sentences perfect* • *But that was one of my first times not having a D on my report card and I think it was almost A/B honor roll* Behavior • He has made *new friends* who are *more supportive and are a more positive influence than the people he hung out with in middle school*, so he gets into less trouble now Self-efficacy • *I feel comfortable enough*

Academic.

Students who participated in the looped class seemed to experience increased success since transitioning from middle school to high school. All of the students in this group had encountered academic struggles, citing peer pressure, anxiety, and learning disabilities, among other things. High-stakes testing was mentioned several times. Gary said in an interview and written reflection that he felt *that nervousness* and *dyslexia* may have contributed to his testing problem. When asked to explain the greatest school struggle for him in an interview, he said, *"mainly just for tests... homework and stuff I can do and in class work I can do, and I can get like 90s and 80s and 100s on that. And then when it comes to the test, I just cannot remember anything. Like at all. I just forget*

everything. So I just can't do good on any test like, at all." Caleb expressed similar sentiment that he cannot really narrow down during his interview: *"I just struggle with tests, it seems like if its a test, it seems like I forget...it just seems like everything just slips my mind."* This can be a significant problem for high school students, whose state test scores make up 25 percent of their final course average. These scores are also used to determine student eligibility for access to the credit recovery program should they fail a course.

Closely related to testing struggles, the most commonly cited problem for these students was reading comprehension. Harley explained her difficulty during the interview: *"the hardest thing is like just reading- the actual reading- for me."* Amanda said during an interview that she struggled primarily with "*mostly just comprehending the reading."* Gary admitted in an interview that he is just *"not very confident about my reading at all."*

Many of these students expressed a belief that they have improved academically while participating in the looped class. Caleb was able to reflect about his feelings about his writing ability. He explained in an interview that *"I've gotten a lot better at writing. Looking at papers from like middle school and then 9th grade to 10th grade, it's gotten a lot better."* Amanda mentioned writing skills in her interview as well: *"I think I'm learning more than I did before. I didn't know- I mean, I knew, but I didn't know the correct punctuation, and I didn't know how to spell well. I still don't, but I'm learning."* She seemed to realize that progress does not only come from grades, but from the act of learning as well. Students like Gary and Amanda have seen academic gains on their report cards as evidenced by school records in addition to comments during the interview.

"*That was one of my first times not having a D on my report card and I think it was almost A/B honor roll. I think I was maybe a point away from having A/B honor roll!"* Gary exclaimed. Amanda reported a similar experience during her interview: *"I'm actually passing reading- I think I'm making a B in that class... and it's the first time I've ever made a B! I've never made Bs in a class before!"*

Teacher Catherine agreed in an interview that academic improvement is often seen within her looped classes, and explained *"I think skills are developed, but more importantly I see confidence being built in the students which leads to academic improvements."* This seemed to mirror some of the looped students' comments about their own confidence or comfort within the school community being increased. Amanda said in an interview that she preferred the loop for this reason, explaining that she *"felt like if I didn't understand it the first semester than I could get it the second semester."* Sherry, another teacher, added the following in an interview: "*The students who were placed appropriately into Strategic Reading and Writing really did receive the help they needed. Some of these kids happened to be in my classes for English II. It was amazing to see how confident they were and how willing to work they were. I expect this success to continue."* Additionally, Caleb said in an interview that he would recommend the looped class to other students who struggle because *"they'd get used to the people and their teacher and they'd like feel comfortable and wouldn't have to be nervous."* Students who are more confident in their school are often more willing to attempt challenging material and would therefore be able to perform better academically (Bandura, 1993).

Reading comprehension, academic achievement, and testing are clearly all related. These students seemed to describe struggles of an academic nature that the

looped English class was designed to address. The school described these courses as follows: “This course is designed to improve comprehension skills in reading as well as to strengthen written communication skills. Students will be reading high interest works from a variety of sources. This course is taken first term prior to English 1 by students whose eighth grade EOG reading scores and teachers indicate that they may need additional skills before taking English 1” by the county’s curriculum bulletin. This looped course is intended to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs that students who are at-risk and struggling with reading often grapple with in more traditionally structured classes.

Social.

Students seemed to attribute some of the improvements they have experienced in high school to increased maturity level, which is natural for students to experience as they transition from middle to high school. Harley said in an interview that she had to “*gain maturity”* since she was placed in a role of more responsibility, caring for her younger siblings while her parents work. Amanda said in an interview that she realized that maturity in high school was key if she wanted to achieve her goal of “*becoming a nurse*.” In middle school, she explained in the interview*, “I wouldn’t try. I wouldn’t finish work. I would talk constantly. You know, I just would be rude and not care*,” but at the time of the interview, she said she has, *“noticed how my grades were failing and I knew I wouldn’t be able to be what I wanted to be when I grew up*.” She expressed in a reflection that she saw high school as “*a fresh start*.” Sherry, a teacher, noted during her interview changes she has seen in student attitudes once they understand the philosophy of a looped class: *“the attitudes of some of the students changed as they saw that we were*

going to work together and help one another succeed in class." Caleb made similar comments in an interview, "*Yeah, in middle school, I got in trouble a lot more and I was a lot more immature,"* but at the time of the study, he said in an interview that he never gets into trouble and is seen by others as "*respectful and hard-working*." Catherine, a teacher, pointed out in an interview that "*easing the transition"* between high school and middle school "*can be helpful to students"* looking to solidify their place in a new school. She additionally explicated in an interview that looping *"provides a bit of stability...that gives a feeling of safety that at-risk students benefit from. They have a stable adult figure in their academic life that is similar to what they have had up to this point in their education."*

This amplification of maturity and stability seemed to have helped with student behavioral instances as well. From the looped group, Amanda, Gary, and Caleb all disclosed being in some trouble in middle school; however, they reported in an interview *never "really getting called down at all actually*" thus far in high school. Caleb also said in an interview that he was more motivated in high school and was "*trying a lot harder than in middle school."* Sherry, a teacher, noted that this might be because "*students make connections with students who also struggle;"* she has seen that the students in looped classes are more able to *"learn to trust the teacher and one another in the classroom. The barriers come down and learning can really progress*." This also could be, as fellow teacher Catherine pointed out in an interview, "*since there's more time, students end up working with all the students in the class and create stronger relationships with them. This could provide them better grounding in the class and in the school in general. Their confidence is built, and students grow socially*" as well as

academically. They can also be more accountable since, as a teacher said in an interview, *"in a looped class, lessons are better and more easily tailored to students' needs as there is time to assess students' strengths and weaknesses and interests and stuff based on the individual*" which would likely help students like Caleb be more motivated to work hard and do as well as possible on assignments which could also be more relevant to the student as an individual. The ability of looping teachers to better understand their students' diverse histories and preferences allows for this differentiation since they are able to get to know the students more fully.

Most notably from these conversations were the discussions about relationships between students and teachers in the looped class. Each of the students seemed to agree that they "*felt comfortable"* with their teacher and "*enjoyed"* having the teacher over the course of the whole year (or longer, in the cases of Amanda and Harley). Catherine, a teacher, explained in an interview that a looped group can feel *like a family* by the end of the year*: "I love teaching a looped class as I feel like we end up feeling closer to one another -more like a family- and I can also see my students change and grow as learners and students in English*." Harley echoed those sentiments about her teacher of three semesters in an interview: "*I didn't know her and then I found out she knew my mom...We got a stronger relationship and like, her daughter and I started becoming like...like kind of like family I guess."* The relationship between looped students and teachers often seems to endure past the courses, as the teacher can become a mentor/advocate figure for the students. "*Freshman year, students end up seeing me as a mentor figure and come back to me when they need academic, or emotional, or general help...Also, they come back to me for book suggestions and to tell me about successes in other classes. So I feel*

like students create a stronger connection to the school and then they're more likely to be successful in other courses and more likely to graduate," Catherine, a teacher, said in an interview about her looped students, who often seem to express comfort in returning to their looped teacher as well. Harley explained in an interview, *"I know how she teaches and how I need to prepare myself for her class already...I feel confident to go on because she's told me I can come to her house and she can help me and stuff If I need it*." Harley said in an interview that she had already used her pre-existing relationship with her looped math teacher from 9th grade to her benefit: "*I like Ms. E better, but like with her since we had each other the whole year last time she's told me I can come to her. And there's been a couple times I told my [new] teacher I didn't understand what he was talking about, could I go talk to Ms. E and he said yeah"* and then she was able to get the help she needed to understand the material. Amanda said in a reflection that she "*felt relieved"* when she found out she would be returning to her previous teacher for English II: *"so this year I was like- I felt relieved because whenever I got in there, I knew it was gonna be okay and I was gonna do well as long as I could, like, focus on school."* Gary, who described his teacher in an interview as a *"really nice person outside of school and a really good teacher too"* was also *excited* to see that he would have his teacher for a third semester, *"I was actually kinda excited cause I knew that she'd put me to work and stuff and not just get it easy and like just let me pass but she sees that I try and stuff and whenever she sees that I'm struggling, she helps me out. Other teachers won't see that, but Ms. R knows me now."*

When asked in interviews if they would recommend being in a loop to other students, all emphatically said they would recommend it for students like them. *"I would*

just tell them about how like my relationship with Ms. R is and how we've gotten to know each other and going throughout the years and how she knows what I need help with. If I have any questions, I feel comfortable enough to ask her if like- if you don't know somebody good enough you don't want to ask them a really like personal question and stuff so. I feel comfortable enough if I have any like problems in life or anything or for school, I can go ask Ms. R, and I know she'll help me out." Sherry, a teacher, echoed those comments in an interview. *"We need those relationships with our lower performing students to get them to grow academically. In fact, I have begun to ask for some of my classes to stay with me for English III. That way I already know everyone's strengths and weaknesses, so we can get straight to the business of learning*."

Analysis

Within this section, the thematic analysis of the data collected for this study is juxtaposed with the corresponding literature on the subject. Topics are discussed within academic and social themes and were chosen because of references to the idea during the interview process.

Academic

This section focuses on student learning and success in the classroom in terms of growth and grades.

Self-perception.

For the purposes of this study, "self-perception" is used with regards to the mental image or ideas one has about him- or herself, and for our purposes here, the focus is on the students' perceptions of their own academic abilities. A student's self-perception can

affect his learning in a way that can impact his future goals, personal motivation, and academic accomplishments (Bandura, 1993).

In terms of academics, while all students (both looped and non-looped) discussed experiencing some level of academic struggles during their high school career up to the point of these interviews (in terms of learning difficulties, peer pressure, academic anxiety, etc.), looped students, in particular, discussed their increased success since middle school in more detail. This could lead one to believe that their experiences of perceived increases in success are more meaningful to them in terms of overall impact. This idea is supported by previous studies; for example, Lindsay (2008) found that some participants expressed an appreciation for looping because its stability fostered social and psychological benefits for students in terms of self-esteem. Within Lindsay's (2008) study, looped students were able to express their own increased confidence, attributing some of this to loop participation: participants reported feeling increased comfort in asking questions, trying new things, and reflecting upon personal growth. All of which, their teachers affirm, are byproducts of a looped experience that allow students to experience increased academic confidence. One of the teachers in this study, Sherry, expects this feeling to have a prolonged benefit for students, even after the loop is over: "It was amazing to see how confident they were and how willing to work they were. I expect this success to continue." Literature shows that a looped classroom can result in an emotional and intellectual climate which can improve students' self-efficacy by encouraging thinking, risk-taking, and involvement with academic tasks (Wynne & Walberg, 1994). Non-looped students also experienced an increase in success, though they spent a great deal more time discussing extra-curricular activities and attributing

increased leadership skills and confidence to programs such as Yearbook, athletics, or school-based clubs. Few of the looped students discussed these programs such as these at all.

Enhanced self-efficacy can correlate to increased learning time. Feelings of self-efficacy affect motivation, cognition, and behavior, so the more positively a student sees herself, the more productively she will approach a task, therefore saving classroom time (Bandura, 1993). Time is saved in a loop because classes do not have to focus on rules, procedures, and establishing a classroom climate at the beginning of the second and any subsequent semesters together and allowing classes to immediately delve into content and curriculum (Burke, 1996; Hanson, 1995). Furthermore, when teachers already know their students' strengths, weaknesses, personalities, and needs, they are able to more appropriately and immediately differentiate instruction in ways that will be effective for both individual students and the whole class (Slates, Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2012). Catherine, one of the teachers interviewed in this study, points out that "in a looped class, lessons are better and more easily tailored to students' needs as there is time to assess students' strengths and weaknesses and interests and stuff based on the individual." It is also possible that students can receive the academic support and access to resources they need more quickly or effectively when looping is present in terms of exceptional children's services and/or remediation or enrichment for all learners (Thompson, 2009; Tienken, 2012). The data suggests that as relationships between students and teachers grow, so does trust and knowledge of how to meet learners' needs.

Academics.

Academic impact is an important factor that should be considered when making any decisions regarding school scheduling. Members of both the looped and non-looped participants in this study noted doing better in high school than they had previously anticipated or than they had done in middle school. The looped students discussed their learning in reflective ways. For example, one student notes his writing growth: "*I've gotten a lot better at writing. Looking at papers from like middle school and then 9th grade to 10th grade, it's gotten a lot better."* Studies by Gregory (2009), Kelley (2004), and Lindsay (2008) have all noted statistically significant academic gains within the looping environments they studied as compared to their equivalent non-looped peers. This is similar to the findings discussed previously, where non-looped participants noted maintaining grades or *"not challenging myself to reach my full potential"* while looped participants seemed more focused on progress and increased academic achievement: *"That was one of my first times not having a D on my report card and I think it was almost A/B honor roll. I think I was maybe a point away from having A/B honor roll!"* This could be related to the fact that teachers' knowledge of individual students' aptitudes and challenges are already known to them, so teachers can more appropriately respond to student behavior and implement learning and behavioral procedures to help students academically than with a group of new students (Pecanic, 2003). When looped, this process does not have to be repeated, allowing more focus on content learning. Ergo, a student like Jake who said *"when I'm reading a passage, like I said before, I'll often doze off and I'll get distracted easily, so I'll just be looking at the passage but not thinking about it…"* could be more likely be noticed by a looped teacher who has already

figured out his distractions and be more prepared to mitigate his inattention, helping him to spend less time off task and increasing his academic success potential. One study of middle school students indicated that looped students showed greater academic improvement than non-looped students in 8 out of 9 statistical comparisons on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (Carroll, 2012). Looping can permit the teacher to meet the needs of individual students (academically, socially, and emotionally), instead of constantly focusing on the class as a whole and trying to teach to the majority of students (Swanson, 1999). This idea is addressed by teachers in this study, who mentioned that it is difficult to differentiate effectively within one semester due to time constraints and course requirements.

Social.

This section focuses on the perception of students by themselves and others, discipline and other behavior, and relationships between teacher and students, students themselves, and other invested parties.

Sherry mentioned that she sees confidence being built in the students who experience looping more than students she only sees for a semester. She feels that this increased confidence leads to increased maturity and achievement. Catherine noted seeing "*the attitudes of some of the students changed as they saw that we were going to work together and help one another succeed in class"* and this change in attitude led to more mature and respectful behavior overall. This is supported by McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) who noted the following: "A key component of improving school environments has been improving personalization, that is, tightening connections between students and their learning environments (e.g. teachers, other adults, student

peers, curriculum, overall campus climate)" (p. 3) which leads to more opportunities for maturation both academically and socially. However, it seems apparent that teachers who see students over an extended period of time would be able to notice student growth of any type more easily than those who only have the student for a short time. Students from both the looped and non-looped groups mentioned increases in maturity over their first two years in high school; those in the looped group mention being comfortable to take chances in a safe environment while the non-looped students were more likely to talk or write about being outside of their comfort zones and having to find their way. Some parents whose students have been in a looped situation noted that it provided classroom stability which in turn fostered social and psychological stability for students, allowed them to mature, and increased their social and emotional well-being (Lindsay, 2008; Thompson, 2009). Teacher Catherine elucidated that easing the transition from middle school can be important for students searching for a place to belong. She points out that a looped class may be one thing that *"provides a bit of stability...that gives a feeling of safety that at-risk students benefit from."*

Behavior.

With increased maturity comes improved behavior. Studies have indicated discipline referrals decreased substantially with the implementation of the looping design and suggested that this reduction in the discipline incidents during the second year of a loop could be credited to improved relationships between home and school as well as more thorough knowledge of teacher expectations, rules, and procedures (Forsten et al., 1997; Grant et al., 1996; Gregory 2012). While many of the students interviewed said they had experienced varying degrees of disciplinary problems in middle school, almost

all of them reported few (if any) infractions in high school. This is noteworthy for at-risk students who are more likely to be swayed by negative peer pressure (Kirst & Wurt, 2009; Kominski, Jamieson & Martinez, 2011). Some suggest that the long-term relationship formed by a looped environment encourages teachers to be more willing to try alternative behavior management strategies when other, more traditional methods are ineffective (Gregory, 2012). As teachers spend more time with their students, they are better able to maintain student engagement, which keeps discipline problems in the classroom to a minimum (Gaustad, 1996; Kelley, 2009).

If student engagement is not at a peak in the classroom, students often seek other activities to be involved with. For some, this may lead to truancy or trouble. For others, like many of the non-looped students in this study, that may come from other school activities (clubs, sports, yearbook, etc.). It is interesting to note that looped students did not really discuss outside activities, but non-looped students mentioned activities quite a bit. Both groups, however, mentioned belonging or fitting in as important to the high school experience. One could consider the thought that a looped class provides a team-like environment that students need while the non-looped students receive the same fulfilment in other ways. Experiencing a feeling of belonging within a looping community can lead to positive self-esteem and decreased disruptive behavior; struggling to find belonging within a larger school community or peer group is less stressful when students feel accepted within their regular classroom (Gregory, 2009; Sladin & Madden, 1989). This can often lead to more desirable behavior. One school district who required elementary-level looping, experienced improvement in several areas of behavior:

attendance rates, discipline write-ups, and grade-level retentions, as well as fewer unwarranted referrals for exceptional children services (Gustad, 1998).

Relationships.

Relationships are key when it comes to education (Epstein, & Sheldon, 2002; Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996; Gregory, 2009). Looped classrooms can foster strong connections that are almost like family (Pecanic, 2003). This can provide a few things that are particularly useful to at-risk students: effective role models, peer support, and stability. Both teachers interviewed in this study agreed with these thoughts, mentioning that looped classes, when created appropriately, were among their favorites to teach as they can be more comfortable for everyone. Looped classes should have students in need of support, and not be primarily for students who are discipline problems, as Sherry explained. Teachers should be chosen thoughtfully as well, considering their expertise with curriculum along with their willingness to participate (Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996). Additionally, there is more sense of investment within looped classes when students and teachers know that everyone is invested for a longer period of time (Hanson, 1995; Swanson, 1999). Amanda reported feeling quite nervous about her classes until she saw she was returning to the same class: "*I felt relieved because whenever I got in there, I knew it was gonna be okay and I was gonna do well as long as I could, like, focus on school."* Long term-relationships within a whole class can create a climate that encourages critical thinking and risk-taking, both academically and emotionally (Wynne & Walberg, 1994). Harley explained this idea: "*I know how she teaches and how I need to prepare myself for her class already...I feel confident to go on because she's told me I can come to her house and she can help me and stuff if I need it*."

At-risk students could be missing much needed emotional support due to any number of factors, so an environment that provides the very thing they are lacking is helpful, as these students could experience increased academic success with teachers they feel are invested in them personally as well as academically (Hanson, 1995; Lindsay, et al, 2008).

Similarly, the changing of teachers and peers each semester could make it more difficult to develop cohesion within classes and schools, and the maintenance of in-depth teacher-student relationships or class culture is difficult to achieve (Lindsay, et al, 2008). This level of comfort could increase difficulty when change occurs later, however (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Gregory, 2009). One of the participants noted this phenomenon when he realized he was going to have a new teacher: "*I freaked out a little bit... because I was very comfortable with Ms. S, so and then this kinda forced me out of my comfort zone. Cause I didn't know much about this guy. And...I couldn't really ask anyone about him. So it was just walking into something completely different."* He went on to explain that now his relationship with his new teacher is *"strong."* Thus, the anxiety can be considered in two ways: as being created by the loop and a sense of dependence on the repeated teacher, or as being alleviated by the loop, which could provide a foundation and help students build social skills to continue on in the future.

Non-looped students agreed that relationships with their teachers are important to their overall class experience. When discussing teachers he has enjoyed, Sam noted: *"My relationship with my English teacher this year was like better because I knew her as a person and not just a teacher...,*" and Maria attributed increased success in English this year to her relationship with her teacher: *"we were close at moments in class she didn't seem like a teacher, she seem like a mother*." This is supported by the literature, which

explains that students who are at-risk often evaluate how effective their teacher is by his/her interest in the students' personal and academic lives (Lindsay, et. al, 2008).

Summary

While all students reported academic struggles, this analysis suggests the students within the looped group reported greater feelings of anxiety about transitioning from middle to high school. Both groups obtained confidence from various sources; the looped group reported more academic confidence that has been gained over time, and the traditionally scheduled group reflected more about finding a place within extracurricular activities in addition to academics. Most of the students in both groups mentioned problems with reading or English class as a weak point; however, all noted improvement in these areas (or at least maintenance of previous level). Few behavior problems have been incurred for any of the students in this study so far in high school. Several students across groups mentioned figuring out a career plan as a motivating factor in their academic and social progress. All eight participating students described their high school experiences thus far in mostly positive terms. A note of caution must be added that these findings are based on a small number of students, but they suggest potential benefits to looping that bear further study.

Academically, the students in the looped group presented more feelings of anxiety about school. The non-looped group discussed extracurricular activities having greater impact on their school experience (yearbook, band, soccer, service clubs, etc. were all mentioned) while only one of the looped students mentioned such activities (track, which was given up for a job). Socially, the looped group mentioned having more behavioral infractions during middle school, though both groups have managed to mostly stay out of

trouble since entering high school. The looped students indicated that their looped teachers have had a stronger personal impact than the non-looped group.

While the two groups of students- looped and non-looped- have a great deal in common; it is interesting to look at what the students describe in more detail in each group: academics, specific struggles, and their teachers as mentors/ role models. Both groups of students mentioned their teachers being an important factor to their academic success and/or social comfort. However, this study suggests that the looped students experienced benefits that differed from those of the non-looped students, specifically, deeper relationships with their teachers and greater reflection on their academic achievements. In the next chapter, I discuss implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, & Conclusions

This chapter provides insights about implications for the findings which were discussed in the fourth chapter. In this chapter, I return to the research questions to sum up how this study has helped to address those and then discuss implications. Although the findings of this study are not generalizable, it is my hope that the implications of this research will serve as fodder for future research on both the topics of looping and at-risk students.

In the late 1800s, American schools began to change, and what is currently referred to as the "factory model" of schools became increasingly prominent (Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000). Often considered "the first great movement toward an organized system of common education, which shall, at once, be thorough and universal," this system strove to overcome decentralization of schools and encourage education for all children, regardless of economic or cultural background (Pestalozzi, 1827). Proponents of this model of schooling advocate for efficiency associated with the "batch processing" of students through utilization of the age-graded organizational structure (Stabler, 1987). Additionally, this model can be viewed as allowing teachers to become experts in a content area and promoting focus on curriculum (Hood, 2010).

However, those who find fault with this model often cite problems with meeting the needs of students as individuals and the "dumbing down" of curriculum (Ravitch, 2001; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000). Another argument against the factory model of schooling is that it treats teachers, schools, and school systems in the same uniform manner as it treats students, which could be considered factors in disparity and struggling schools (Hood, 1995). Still others contend that, while the environment,

politics, technology, and the workforce have changed, the ways in which American schools are run have not, which they see as problematic in terms of meeting the ever-changing demands of today's society (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ravitch, 2001).

While the factory model still persists, many schools are working within this structure to better meet the needs of diverse and struggling students. Various initiatives have been implemented to assist students with the transition to high school: freshman academies, summer bridge programs, and mentoring are examples of such programs (Sagor &Cox, 2004). Creating looped schedules is yet another initiative that shows promise for dealing with both the transition issue and differentiation.

One major concern for school systems across the country is the dropout rate. Students who are deemed to have an increased probability of dropping out or not graduating on time with their cohort are considered "at-risk" and often lack the social support or academic skills required of students to allow them to be successful, particularly in a traditional, or factory model, school (Kominski, Jamieson, & Martinez, 2011; Metzger, 2015). Schools are even being referred to as "dropout factories" for mass-producing students who do not graduate due in part to the antiquated system that does not meet the needs of the individual students being served.

This research suggests that looping offers one way to address some of these challenges inherent in the factory model. This allows a single group of students to remain with the same teacher(s) for more than one class over multiple semesters or school years (Burke, 1996; Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Gregory, 2009; Jacoby, 1995). Within the scope of the research findings of this study, it could be suggested that the

looping model may be useful in mitigating some of the components that impede at-risk students.

Findings in this study of looped high school students support and are in line with research about looping at the elementary level. The students in this study reflected on their academic growth personally, noting improvement they can see in their writing, grammar, reading comprehension, and grades. Statistical analyses of looped elementary students support that students grow more academically when looped (Kelley, 2004; Pecanic, 2003). In one case, this academic achievement occurred "even when both groups were taught *by the same teacher*," (emphasis in the original) (Burke, 1997). Additionally, participants in this study discussed relationships being an important factor for academic success, student self-efficacy, and behavioral improvement. Students of all ages report that relationships with their teachers significantly impact their academic achievement, saying they perform better when they know their teachers care about them personally as well as academically (Lindsay, et.al, 2008). The relationships that develop are described as the foundational element of looping programs (Grant, Johnson & Richardson, 1996). These relationships provide students with a personalized classroom experience, which serves to encourage deeper thinking, risk-taking and classroom participation while providing the students with consistent role models that students may be lacking outside of school (Burke, 1997; Carroll, 2012; Grant, et. al, 1996; Lindsay, et al, 2008).

Limitations

While this study provides a good starting place for examining the potential effects of looping on at-risk students, there are limitations, particularly in terms of generalizability. Because of the small sample size, as well as the fact, that the students all

came from the same school, their experiences cannot be considered representative of a majority of students.

Other perspectives could provide more valuable insight as well: teachers, administrators, and parents, for example, could discuss other concerns or benefits of such a program. Participants from different school sizes and geographic regions could have different challenges or experiences that would prove informative, as would students of other backgrounds who may not be considered at-risk.

Furthermore, due to time and scheduling constraints, the researcher was unable to observe the looped and non-looped classes referenced in this study. This created a dependency on participant interviews and written reflections that was unable to be assessed by someone outside of the classrooms in question. Classroom observations could provide important context and additional data sources and is a goal for future research.

Student Experiences

Students were asked a series of questions exploring the following research question: how do high school students describe their experiences in looped English classes for academic purposes? Students who participate in a looped English class generally describe these experiences as positive. Non-looped students also describe positive experiences within the school community; interestingly, for those students, discussions of extracurricular activities and their impact seemed to be more prominent in interviews than those of academic situations. With non-looped students, it seemed that classes were a minor contributing factor to the development of their self-image, while looped students talked primarily about finding their place academically. The most

recurrent factor mentioned by looped students was the relationship that developed between students and their teacher. Research indicates lack of personal relationships, academic concern, effective role models, and school connection as key factors in school attrition for these students (Haslinger, et al.,1996; Kominski, et al, 2011; Sagor & Cox, 2004).

The relationships that are created when a teacher and her class spend multiple semesters together can be a key transitional component for at-risk high school students. Transitions tend to be a particularly large hurdle, whether major life transitions like switching schools or moving or daily transitions like moving from one class to another; these areas tend to be when students feel less stable and are more likely to get into trouble (Metzger, 2015). Stable relationships can help alleviate some of this stress, particularly for at-risk students (Pennington, 2011; Swanson, 1999). Harley explains how the relationship she created with her teacher increased her self-confidence and led her to believe in her ability to be successful in school: "*I know how she teaches and how I need to prepare myself for her class already...I feel confident to go on…she can help me and stuff if I need it*." This level of comfort can build students' confidence both emotionally and academically. Caleb stressed that having the same teacher allowed him to *"get used to the teacher and feel more comfortable"* which he says he thinks led to improvement in both reading and writing. One of the teachers interviewed noted that not only are skills improved in a looped class, but confidence is also developed, which leads to a cycle of academic and emotional progress. Another teacher echoed these sentiments: *"it was amazing to see how confident they were and how willing to work they were. I expect this success to continue.*" The relationship between safe, stable environments, student

confidence, and academics has been documented (Bandura, 1993; Gregory, 2009; Kelly, 2004).

Both looped and non-looped students stressed the relationship with their teacher as important: "*I knew her as a person and not just a teacher,"* said Sam, explaining why his sophomore English teacher was his favorite. Maria agreed, saying of her class: *"we were close at moments in class she didn't seem like a teacher, she seem like a mother"* so she felt comfortable asking questions or sharing ideas due to the close-knit environment. Both teachers echoed this sentiment, noting that looped classes were among their favorites to teach as they are often more comfortable for everyone, creating an environment that supports learning and sharing, especially in the English/Language Arts discipline. This is not surprising, as the student and teacher relationship is often cited as an integral factor in looping when it occurs in other countries and grade levels (Carrol, 2012; Gregory, 2009; Hanson, 1995; Kelley, 2004; Jacoby, 1995). Relationships are key in creating and sustaining a successful learning environment; the more comfortable a student feels, the more likely he or she is to want to learn and succeed academically. "All learning is double-coded – emotionally and cognitively. Relationships constitute the primary motivation for almost all learning" (Payne, 2008, p. 22). While non-looped students also indicated developing relationships with their teachers, they did not discuss those in as much detail. Interestingly, these students all preferred their second teacher to the first. One student, Sam, noted his increased success and comfort in English II, and credits this to his relationship with his teacher, which had been already established*: "My relationship with my English teacher this year was like better because I knew her as a person and not just a teacher...we knew each other from before I was in her class and we*

can joke around and stuff." This comfort level allowed him to be himself in his English class, he said, and he performed better in this class than in his previous English I class, which supports the idea that relationships matter when it comes to students' academic and social experiences.

Academic and Social Perspectives

Students were asked a series of questions exploring the following research question: how does the looping method of scheduling English classes for academic success affect high school students academically and socially? Building on the idea of the importance of relationships, a sense of belonging can lead to increased self- efficacy, which is especially important to students who are at-risk. Studies indicate that academic programs such as looping help increase student achievement and self-efficacy, which, in turn, creates more internal motivation (Alfassi, 2003; Bandura, 1997). One student, Anna, underscored this idea: *"I connected with my teacher more, so I got more out of her class."* Utilizing programs "geared to foster both academic competence and confidence provides a beneficial synergy to the student" (Alfassi, 2003). Studies support the ideas of situated learning theory and communities of practice, indicating that to improve achievement, schools should focus on using communities of practice to raise students' self-efficacy (Alfassi, 2003; Bandura, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Differentiation of instruction is possible when teachers know students better, which can build feelings of self-efficacy because students are invested in the material and in the class. One teacher described the shift in perception within her looped class thus: "the attitudes of some of the students changed as they saw that we were going to work together and help one another succeed in class." The Educational Research Service

identified differentiation as an important educational trend to shape schools in the future: "In order to teach culturally and academically diverse populations effectively, schools will have to move from standardized instruction to personalized instruction" that responds to students' unique background, life experiences, and interests (Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005).

Academically, students who participated in the looped English class were able to reflect on their learning and note their own progress. Data from the looped students provides limited evidence that looped students were more reflective about their learning, as they noted academic improvements more explicitly. One student discussed how his writing had improved from middle to high school. "*I've gotten a lot better at writing. Looking at papers from like middle school and then 9th grade to 10th grade, it's gotten a lot better."* Another specifically mentioned comprehending grammatical concepts when her teacher explained it the same way for two semesters. Several looped students mentioned feeling more comfortable asking their looped teacher for help or returning to their looped teacher when in need of assistance for other classes. One student mentioned that she has a preference for repeating teachers because *"I already know them and like that they will help me."* Another looped student agreed with this idea: *"I like Ms. E. better, but like with her since we had each other the whole year last time she's told me I can come to her. And there's been a couple times I told my teacher I didn't understand what he was talking about, could I go talk to Ms. E and he said yeah*" and Harley said she felt she was able to understand the material that way. The students who did not loop did not really mention this at all, which seems to lead back to the idea of strong relationships boosting academic achievement (Hanson, 1995). A study by Burke (1997) found that

increased academic achievement was apparent “even when both groups were taught by the same teacher,” (emphasis in the original).

Students who are at-risk and struggling in schools often possess behavioral factors that impede their progress (Sagor & Cox, 2004). Lack of maturity can compound to create discipline problems that often affect the academic achievements of these students as well. By creating opportunities where students feel comfortable with strong, sustained role models and peer groups, students who are at-risk are more inclined to form positive relationships with schools and academics and succeed further. As these students have shared, participating in a looped class seems to enhance the relationships between students and teachers and foster positive academic climates.

Socially, looped students felt they had attained a degree of maturity while in the looped class. While many of the students interviewed said they had experienced disciplinary problems previously, almost all of them reported improved behavior in high school. Gary attributed this to two things: his increased maturity level and newfound friends, some of whom were made in his looped class. He explained in an interview that he has since made new friends who are more supportive and are a more positive influence than the people he hung out with in middle school, so he is less likely to experience negative peer pressure. At-risk students could be more likely to be swayed by negative peer pressure and disciplinary infractions are considered a predictive factor for dropping out of high school, so any initiatives that support positive behavioral intervention systems, such as looping, are worth consideration (Kominski, Jamieson, & Martinez, 2011). One teacher agreed in an interview that, “since there’s more time, students end up working with all the students in the class and create stronger relationships with them.

This could provide them better grounding in the class and in the school in general. Their confidence is built, and students grow socially" which often leads to less disciplinary problems.

This connects to Lave and Wenger's ideas relating to Communities of Practice; one of which is that "trust among members leads to shared knowledge and shared practices" (Lave & Wegner, 1991). Both teachers in the study supported this idea, noting that students are able to grow when they feel a common purpose and camaraderie within their learning environments. Students from the looped group also mentioned feeling comfortable or secure within their group, which led to increased academic success and self-efficacy. This is supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the ideas that all learning is a social process and the human interactions that surround the act of learning will, to some extent, determine the effectiveness of the learning process (Vygotsky,1978). All students and teachers in this study stressed the importance of *comfort, stability,* and *well-established relationships* between students and teachers for at-risk students to be successful academically and socially.

Other models of support and high school reform have been founded on similar principles (Littky & Grabelle, 2004; Sizer,1985). While some practices, like Littky's Met Schools, have had regional influence, their emphasis on extensive reform has kept their influence from expanding geographically (Littky & Grabelle, 2004). Other movements, such as those of Theodore Sizer, were significantly adopted for a time, but were not sustainable with the growth of the standards and testing movement and currently have very few participating schools (Coalition, 2018; Sizer, 1985). Because the looping model is adaptable within existing school models and does not change curriculum, but instead

adds additional time to develop students' skills, looping is perhaps a more manageable or sustainable model, as it can provide academic support as individual schools deem appropriate without changing the entire grammar of each individual school (Tiak & Cuban, 1995).

While findings within this study support related literature in that improved academic confidence and school-based relationships may exist within looped classes, broader implications may apply.

Implications for Practice

What do the findings of this study tell us about effective practices for educating at-risk students in American high schools?

Social.

First, we must consider the students we are educating when it comes to determining the best ways in which we create school schedules. Students who are at-risk for dropping out have differing needs from their peers who are high-achievers, and, in order to level the playing field, we must have support systems or interventions in place. Preparing to help students find a place to belong when they enter high school is much more effective than allowing them to struggle. The relationships created within a looped schedule can ease the social transition to high school: creating a built-in peer group and setting up caring adult(s) as mentors.

Looping may be an effective intervention for some students as it can provide an environment with added structure and role models for students. Consistent access to caring adults is one way to help students who are at-risk integrate into the school community in a way that feels safe and more controlled. Additionally, the looping

structure can be used within the more traditional high school schedules that are already in place, whether that is block, A day B day, or the seven-period day. This environment, reminiscent of what many students have already experienced with in middle schools, could help provide a smoother transition to high school, as it echoes some of the key ideas of the middle school concept: team environment, interdisciplinary connections, and advisory connections (Schaefer, et. al, 2016).

Academics.

The stability provided by a looped classroom experience could provide academic benefits to at-risk students. The comfort level achieved by the consistent environment may encourage student to take intellectual risks, ask more questions, and reflect upon their learning, which, in turn, could increase learning time and success (Lindsay, 2008; Wynne & Walburg, 1994). More time is created for learning within a looped classroom, as students do not have to be reintroduced to other individuals, procedures, and environment. After the first semester, students have common background knowledge, which the teacher can draw upon to review or build new knowledge. Students in this study reported feeling more comfortable getting help from their looped teachers, even seeking them out for academic help once the loop had ended. The relationships built within a loop can allow for more individualized assistance and instruction, which can manifest in improved academic ability and increased test scores (Gregory, 2012). The teachers interviewed for this study echoed Wynne and Walburg (1994) by noting increased confidence and willingness to tackle challenging academic tasks, thereby increasing feelings of self-efficacy and involvement with intellectual endeavors.

While the at-risk students in this study experienced positive academic outcomes in both looped and non-looped English classes, the main takeaway from both groups is that relationships with caring adults is a key component for success. Teachers have an impact on the social and academic experiences of all high school students and can help students succeed both academically and socially.

Implications for Research

While this study has provided insight into the experiences of some students, the results are not generalizable. I do feel, however, that they provide a foundation for similar studies in the future.

Other areas of research include examining the quantitative effects of looping on at-risk students, looping and gifted or honors-level students, and the effect of looping on teachers and schools, or including parent and administrator perspectives. Examining looped students' experiences to graduation and beyond could provide additional insight into the impact of their looped experiences. Studies that include greater numbers of students and students from different geographic and economic backgrounds would also help to shed light on the concept of looping and its application and usefulness at the secondary level in a more generalizable way, including for purposes other than academic support.

Additionally, examining other aspects of at-risk students' experiences could also prove worthwhile. Possible topics include introversion, extroversion, and the drop-out rate and the experiences of students who are at-risk in urban versus rural settings. Other programs could be studied in conjunction with looping to compare effectiveness for reducing the drop-out rate, such as mentoring, freshman academies, summer transition

programs, and peer support. Utilizing students with a variety of demographics and with more varied school experiences would allow for more generalizability in terms of results.

Concluding Remarks

Each student in this study brought to the table different strengths, weaknesses, and life experiences. These factors greatly impact a student's school experience, and there is no way to predict the path a given student will follow. With that being said, this study highlighted the importance of relationships that develop in classrooms between and among teachers and students and the impact these relationships can have on students academically as well as socially or emotionally. This study suggests what I have believed as a teacher who has taught students across multiple academic semesters and years, that looping offers a model for addressing the needs of at-risk and marginalized students that can operate within the existing factory model that has existed in secondary education in the U.S. over the last century.

The school utilized for this study, in fact, seems to have embraced the ideas of creating sustained relationships for different types of looping. While the foundational courses looping into Math 1 and English 1 continue for at-risk freshmen, this similar course structure is being used for gifted students as well. "Combo classes" have been implemented for students taking Advanced Placement courses. These combo classes pair two academic classes (for example, English II Honors and AP Human Geography, AP English Language and AP US History, or AP English Literature and AP European History) in a year-long format, typically with an alternating A-day, B-day format. These courses allow students to access the curriculum all year, as their two classes build upon each other and their relationships with teachers and students are consistently developed.

While the implementation of looping in its various forms may not be appropriate for every school or student, it is something that this school continues to implement.

I believe we, as educators, can work within the system currently in place to better meet the needs of the students and communities we serve. Looping is a manageable practice that fits within the current grammar of schooling. As an initiative that does not cost anything and can be implemented as individual schools deem appropriate for their students, looping can help mitigate factors that may increase the likelihood of a student dropping out. By implementing programs designed to provide long-term support, like looping, that allow us to create lasting bonds within the community, we can enact meaningful change on our schools and towns.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Background information: age, gender, class schedule etc.
- How do you see yourself as a student?
- Is your vision of yourself as a student different than in the past? Explain.
- What is your greatest school success? Setback?
- Tell me about your English class last year.
- How is your relationship with your English teacher last year? This year? Explain.
- How did you feel when this semester started (re: English class)? Why?
- How are your grades in high school English compared to middle school? Why do you think this is?
- How are your grades in 9th grade English compared to 10th grade English? Why do you think that is?
- Have your feelings about reading or writing changed since you've been in high school? How? Why?
- What has challenged you academically so far in high school? Socially? Explain.
- Has your behavior changed during your time in high school? Explain, Why?
- What are your thoughts about entering English next year?
- Which English class did you prefer (9th or 10th grade)? Why?
- What else would you like me to know about your English classes? School?
- Looped students: Tell me about your experience having the same teacher twice.

APPENDIX B: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How did you come to teach a looped class?
- What do you see as the benefits of the looped English I class? Detriments?
- Tell me about your experience as the teacher of the looped class.
- Tell me about your observations of students throughout this class.
    - Socially?
    - Academically?
    - Behaviorally?
- Is there anything else you'd like me to know about this class or these students?
- How does teaching a looped class compare to teaching a traditional one-semester class?