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The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students After Participating in a Middle School Looping Program

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**THE IMPACT ON THE RELATIONSHIPS OF NINTH GRADE STUDENTS AFTER
PARTICIPATING IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL LOOPING PROGRAM**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education**

**AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

2013

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Lindell Library
Minneapolis, MN 55454**

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Action Research Project of

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has been approved by the Review Committee, and fulfills the requirements for the Master of Arts
in Education degree.

Date of Symposium: June 19, 2013

Date Completed: June 26, 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my administration and peers in my school district for giving me the idea and task to complete worthwhile research. A special thank you to my director of teaching and learning, Janet Pladson and associate principal, Dennis Lambert for their approval and guidance. I would also like to thank the teachers, counselors, students and parents of the Amber Team for allowing me to use their feedback and opinions on looping. This paper would not have been possible without them.

I would also like to thank the staff at Augsburg College for their support and guidance. Especially Vicki Olson and Velma Lashbrook. Without the countless hours of proofreading and feedback to complete this paper, it could not have happened. Lastly, I would like to thank my reader, Lynn Lindow for your time and commitment to the finalization of this research paper.

Next, I would like to thank my family. Especially, my Dad, my sister Leah, my aunt Berta, and my grandma Prentice. They have seen and heard about this process first hand. Through it all, they continued to challenge and push me to completion. Most often they reminded me of all the times I should have been working, but decided to fill my time with other tasks and activities. In the end, the time spent was worth it and their encouragement made it happen.

Lastly, this paper is dedicated to my mom, who died after a short battle with brain cancer during my work on this paper. She taught me to always set my goals high and never stop trying to achieve them. She taught me that I can be and do whatever I want and to stick up for what I know is right. Her lessons and the impact she made while she was here will never be forgotten. Thanks Mom, I did it!

ABSTRACT

The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students After Participating in a Middle School Looping Program

Tara Martinson

June 26, 2013

Action Research Project

This study explored the impact on the relationships of ninth grade students with both their peers and their teachers after being students of a middle school looping program. The school district studied was a large suburban district in the Midwest. The students were members of a looping team for their 7th and 8th grade school years. These approximately 150 students and teachers stayed together for the two consecutive years. The majority of these students went on to the 9th grade local high school. The study examined if students were able to initiate and maintain healthy relationships with their peers and teachers in 9th grade. The results of this study strongly suggest that students do not have difficulties with their peer and teacher relationships at the high school after being members of a middle school looping team.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Purpose Statement	2
Importance of the Study.....	3
Literature Review.....	5
Relationships	5
Additional Benefits.....	7
Methodology	11
Participants.....	11
Materials.....	13
Procedures	14
Analysis.....	15
Findings	17
Results of the Survey.....	17
Focus Groups.....	25
Discussion	33
Overview of the Study.....	33
Summary of Findings.....	33
Conclusions	34
Recommendations	37
Limitations of the Study	38
Personal Reflection	40

Accomplishment and Meaning	40
Process.....	41
Learned about Me.....	41
References	43

Tables

Table 1: Results of Parent Responses to Questions 6a-6c	19
Table 2: Results of Parent Responses to Question 6d	20
Table 3: Student Responses Improved Relationship Skills	20
Table 4: Student Responses to Current 9 th Grade Relationships	21
Table 5: Student Responses to Teacher Relationships	22
Table 6: Student Responses to Recommending Looping	23

Appendices

Appendix A: Introduction Letter	45
Appendix B: Parent Consent Form	47
Appendix C: Parent Survey	50
Appendix D: Student Consent Form.....	53
Appendix E: Student Survey	56
Appendix F: Parent Focus Group Consent Form	59
Appendix G: Parent Focus Group Questions	62

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As teachers we often ponder the future of our students. Questions we ask include “How are they doing academically and socially?” and “I wonder if they have continued their successes and struggles?” I currently teach seventh and eighth grade mathematics at a second ring suburban Midwest school. As a teacher, I often ask similar questions and because of these questions, I decided to make an attempt to answer them through this action research project.

In the 2008-2009 school year, there were 1477 seventh and eighth grade students in my school. The student population was 81% Caucasian, 8% Black, 8% Asian and 3% Hispanic. Based on these numbers, the school continued to strive to increase diversity within the staff and student body. Only 11% of students qualified for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch therefore informally labeling the school as a fairly affluent building. Many students were involved in out-of-school extracurricular activities such as dance, ice-skating, hockey, basketball and church. The school also provided student activities and organizations for a wide range of interests such as student council, yearbook, pin guard, bowling and art club. At the time of the study, you would often see students before and after school in classrooms for various reasons including the after school programs and to receive extra help from their teachers. The middle school is a transition time between elementary and high school (grades 9-12) and can often be a difficult time for students. In cohesion with the definition of a middle school model, the school’s mission stated, “This environment will be caring, exciting, challenging, and comforting. We strive to provide a model for responsible adult behavior while allowing for the activity of youthful enthusiasm.”

Purpose Statement

In 2006 and after extensive research from a professional learning community (PLC) at the school, the team that I studied became the first looping team. The looping model refers to a group of core teachers and/or school professionals that advance with their students to the next grade level for a period of two or three years. This may occur at the elementary or middle school levels. The team I studied was comprised of approximately 150 students and six staff members. As a looping team these students and staff remained together for two sequential school years ending in June of 2008. Research was conducted in 2008 by another teacher at this school on the impact looping had on student achievement. The findings indicated that all teams at the school made academic growth, but there was no differentiation between the control group and the experimental group (Hansen, 2008). The control group was identified as being the non-looping teams and the experimental group was identified as the looping team. Another topic needing to be explored and researched was the effect looping had on the student's relationships with their peers and teachers as the students transitioned to the district's high school. Specifically, the purpose of this current action research study is to explore and attempt to answer this question: What is the impact of participating in a middle school looping program on the relationships of ninth grade students with peers and teachers?

As parents make the decision of whether looping would be a good fit for their student, they often wonder what impact the consistency provided by looping at the middle school has on their student's transition to the district's high school. This question drives the purpose behind this study. One of the student's transitions includes the daily schedule. The middle school operates under a six period schedule with a short time at the beginning of the day for advisory. During the course of the day, the student will see their core teachers, quarter class

teacher, music teacher and world language teacher. They also attend classes with other students on their team. How does this setting prepare them for building and maintaining relationships when they transition to the high school?

The district's high school operates under a block schedule in which a full yearlong course is completed in a semester (or half a year). Therefore, the pace of the curriculum is drastically increased along with the number of teachers. Ultimately, over a school year, the courses double the speed of the middle school curriculum and students are exposed (at the minimum) to twice the number of teachers. In terms of peers, the students are expected to transition from their middle school team of approximately 150 students to a situation at the high school where they meet a different, mixed-age group of students in each class. The only point of consistency at the high school is the student's counselor. Whenever possible, the counselor is assigned as a freshman and remains consistent throughout the student's four-year tenure. Overall, the high school structure, academically and socially, is very different from the structure of the middle school.

In summary, the specific questions in my study are: After participating in a middle school looping program (1) have the students successfully maintained or built new friendships at the high school? (2) Have the students successfully built and maintained healthy relationships with their teachers at the high school?

Importance of the Study

This study is important and provides information and value to educational professionals, parents and students in this district. It also provides insight to the school district on whether to continue providing a looping opportunity to students at the middle school. The middle school currently has three teams committed to looping cycles. Two teams are in their second year (8th

grade) and one team is in their first year (7th grade) of the cycle. It will also provide information that can be presented to families and students who are considering whether looping is a good fit for their student. This study is specific to the needs of the school district.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Educational methods and structures tend to cycle in regards to which are the most effective. Throughout the country, we have schools that demonstrate many different models of best practice. Most of our schools have a common goal to educate our children to the highest level of achievement. One model that has gained support in the past several decades is the looping model. The looping model refers to a set of core teachers that advance with their students to the next grade level in succession for two or three years. Past research discusses the benefits of looping at the elementary level and more recently at the middle school level. The idea is the middle school student requires a greater emphasis on building and maintaining relationships (Crosby, 1998). Looping can provide long-term stability and consistency for the students, teachers and parents. Although there are a few reported downfalls to looping, the benefits appear to outweigh the downfalls. I will look at relationships, additional benefits and possible downfalls.

Relationships

A major component in the discussion surrounding the benefits of looping is the dynamics of the relationships involved. There are a few identified relationships that impact the looping model. The relationships are identified as teacher to student, student to student, and teacher to parent. All these relationships must be created and maintained throughout the looping years. In her study, Linda Denault (1999) states, "Boyer's research determined that the most essential ingredient of an effective school can be summed up in the word 'connection'. Looping offers a number of special connections between the teacher and student, among students, and between home and school." (p. 20) The cohesion and engagement between students, teachers, and parents

provides the student with the opportunity to become immersed in a connected society in which there are common goals.

Teacher and Student Relationships. The looping model affects the relationship between the teacher and the student. The teachers become aware of the students' strengths and weaknesses. In reverse, each student also becomes aware of the teacher's strong or not-so-strong points (Elliot, 1998). Along the same line, the teacher understands the students' learning styles. Although most teachers present their lessons using multiple approaches, if teachers have knowledge of how their students learn best, they can plan more efficiently. Patricia Crosby, an experienced looping teacher at Coethro Middle School in Massachusetts, thoroughly discusses the benefits. Crosby (1998) believes a teacher can target acceleration or remediation, must create a caring environment in which the classroom is a "safe, stable haven for everyone" (p. 47), and must have the ability to recognize any major personality changes in a student. A personality change may indicate that a student is beginning to experiment with drugs, alcohol, or other at-risk behaviors. If identified early, the counselors can be proactive. A good teacher to student relationship may lead to increased motivation. The students may choose to stay after school just to be in the classroom or take part in preparing the classroom for the second school year (Elliot, 1998). The opportunity to create and maintain a positive rapport with the students presents itself many times over the two to three looping years.

Student to Student Relationships. The looping model also impacts relationships among the students. In an article written by Burke (1996), he reports that 69% of students in a looping setting are more willing to voluntarily participate in class and 85% of the students saw themselves as important members of a group. This sense of belonging created more pride in the

group and more pride in the school. Students who begin a school year with familiar peers, have less apprehension. (Burke, 1997).

Another benefit to looping is the decrease in behavioral concerns. The students are aware they are going to be connected over at least a two-year period of time. This encourages the students to work out conflicts due to the longevity of their frequent contact (Lincoln, 1998). In contrast, students who have a shy personality, have an increased social safety net and greater sense of self. This leads to an increase in self-confidence (Burke, 1997). Again, the students feel a sense of community in which they feel trust and belonging is important.

Teacher and Parent Relationships. Lastly, the school to home relationship is impacted. Just as the students feel a sense of responsibility to the relationship, the families of looping students play a vital role in the success. In the Denault (1999) study, 97% of teachers indicated a stronger home-school relationship. Also encouraging, Daniel Burke (1996) reported 84% of teachers reported more positive relationships with parents. The parent(s) must partner with the teachers and school for the two to three year looping opportunity. The long-term commitment encourages positive interactions and increased problem solving between teachers and parents.

Additional Benefits

Increase in Instructional Time. The looping model expands teaching time. The summer between the looping years are often used for curriculum-based assignments. Therefore, June and September are not lost in closing the year and starting the new school year. Rules, reviewing, and testing are not necessary at the start of the second and third years. (Burke, 1996, Hansen, 1995). The relationships are already strong and after some minor transition, the curriculum can be initiated. Crosby (1998) estimates that four months of instructional time is gained through the looping model over a two-year commitment.

Adjusting the Curriculum. An additional academic benefit is the flexibility in the pacing of the curriculum. Teachers are able to differentiate for the enriched student. In conjunction, teachers can make adaptations and necessary changes in the curriculum for the slower learning students. This is found to be most beneficial for students with academic or social challenges. Middle school teachers must understand that rapid growth, change and development may cause difficulties for students during this time in their lives (Thompson, Franz & Miiller, 2009). Over the two-year looping period, teachers have the flexibility to plan and create appropriate activities for students. Teachers can focus the lessons and activities specifically on the skills needing mastery (Mazzuchi and Brooks, 1992). Overall, looping allows greater flexibility for the teacher and the student. This flexibility has shown a decrease in the need for student retention (Burke, 1997).

Downfalls

General Concerns. Although few have been identified, Bafile (2009) discussed some downfalls to the looping model. On occasion, student and teacher personalities may conflict. Conflict resolution could be necessary, and due to the extended time of looping, is crucial. A second concern is the student assignment to a poor teacher. Having a poor teacher for multiple years may lead to deficits in a particular subject. Movement is a third concern. It's very common that a teacher may move grade level, subjects, buildings and even districts. Teacher movement in the middle of a looping cycle disturbs the looping model. The same concern occurs when students move in or out of a looping team in the middle of a looping cycle.

Teacher Concerns. In a middle school, often times sections of the building are designated for certain grade levels. When the looping model is initiated, the need to move with the grade level becomes a concern for teachers. The inconvenience of moving every year, even if it is back and

forth between two grade levels, has the potential to become frustrating. Looping teachers are also given the choice to share their materials with the teachers of both grades. The increase in the number of materials may also present a space limitation for the looping teachers. (Little and Dacus, 1999). A second teacher concern was reported in the study conducted by Denault (1999). The study reported a teacher who believed the parent-teacher relationship had become too friendly within the second year. This relationship made the teacher uncomfortable. As you can see, it is important for a teacher who is considering looping, to be aware of the possible frustrations.

Looping has the potential to become more prevalent. Relationships are the backbone to the model's success. In a quantitative study conducted by Joe Nichols (2002), he said,

Educators and parents have a responsibility to teach children that all positive human relationships evolve through time, passing through numerous tensions. 'Persisting [looping] groups in schools help students practice making such critical adaptations,' so they can learn how to relate to other, instead of failing to communicate in a productive manner. The ability to learn the characteristics of healthy relationships from the looping experience is very critical to the success of the model. (p. 5)

Parent Responses. George, Spreul and Moorefield (1987), conducted a three-year study on teacher-student relationships. They found 84% of the teachers reported their relationships with the parents were more positive than the traditional one year relationship. More importantly, the parents reported 99% of them "requested that their child have the same teacher as the previous year." (Burke, 1996, p. 360). As expected, parents provide encouragement but also have concerns.

One parent concern is how later transitions will be impacted by the looping model. Very little research has been conducted based on this concern. One article identified several of the parent concerns as disadvantages. The first concern is the difficulty of adjusting to a large school environment after being in a small group for multiple years. The second was identified as the difficulty of separating at the end of the looping period. Passion on behalf of the teachers and attachment for the students may create difficulties (Bafile, 2009).

Another brief discussion was included in a journal article by Hegde and Cassidy (2004), in which the concern was addressed at a high quality childcare facility. The parents of the young students wanted to know how the transition from familiar teachers to unknown teachers, a familiar environment to different environment, and a change in philosophy would impact their child. Would this lead to separation anxiety at such as young age? In his article, Lincoln (1998) also commented on the need for more knowledge concerning “how students looped in the 7th/8th grades adjust to the 9th grade” (p. 2). Would the transition to a new set of teachers and peers be a concern? The purpose of my study will be to answer Lincoln’s question. Specifically, I will focus on the outcome of relationship skills of seventh and eighth grade looping students and how it impacts their transition to ninth grade.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Participants

School Information. The school currently being studied is a seventh and eighth grade middle school. It is located in a suburb of a major Midwest metropolitan area. The school adapted and has been using the teaming model for approximately 20 years. The school has about 1,450 students ranging in ages from 12-14 years and coming from a wide range of demographics and backgrounds. Prior to attending the middle school, students spend fifth and sixth grade at the intermediate school. While at the intermediate school they are also in a teaming model with the teams being referred to as “atriums”. Unlike at the middle school, in the intermediate school, they remain in a single classroom for the majority of their day, but may switch teachers for math and reading. Similar to the intermediate school, the middle school staff consists of administrators, core, elective and special education teachers, counselors and support staff. The largest transition for students starting their seventh grade year is the middle school schedule in which they change classes every period. For most students, they travel throughout their day as a designated team with the same students and core teachers.

General Team Information. Each team at the middle school consists of approximately 150 students. When the middle school began the teaming model, the teams were balanced by the demographics of diversity, special education, English language learners (ELL) and gifted and talented students. In more recent years, achieving this balance has become more challenging as the number of class offerings, such as world language and orchestra, has increased as well as the special education and ELL populations. This naturally groups students based on their interests and needs rather than by balanced demographics. At the time of this study, the teams were

skewed due to the increase in the specialized groups.

Also, during the time of the study, with the exception of a few, all students and teachers were members of one of 10 teams. Each team consisted of six core professionals, specifically one of each of the following: Math, Science, English, Social Studies, special education teachers and a school counselor. The majority of students also took course requirements and electives in Music, World Language, Family and Consumer Science, Health, Physical Education and Art. Student and staff schedules were based on a six period day with a short advisory time. Advisory time was used for team building and additional academic instruction.

Specific Team Information. The group studied consisted of students who were a member of a specific looping team during their 2006-2008 school years. The students were identified and a team teacher released contact information to the researcher with permission from the district's Director of Teaching and Learning. Any student who was a member of the team being studied only one of the two consecutive years was omitted from the study. Eight students who were listed as team members were eliminated prior to any contact because they were identified as being members of the team for less than two years. Two additional students returned their surveys stating they were not members of the team for both years. In total, 10 students were omitted.

Survey Participants. Students and their parent/guardians were contacted via one mailing sent by the researcher. All necessary information and instruction was included for both students and parents. After making the decision to participate, the participants, both students and parents, signed separate consent forms and completed the appropriate surveys. In the end, the participants were 24 parents and 19 students. The parent participants were 22 female and 2 male

and the student participants were 11 female and 8 male. The last survey was received in the fall of 2009.

Focus Group Participants. In addition to the survey, there were 17 parents and 9 students who responded they would be interested in participating in a focus group. In the spring of 2010, the researcher contacted these 28 participants via United States Postal Service (USPS) with two possible dates for the focus group to be held. Seven female parents and one female student responded with availability and participated in the focus group.

Materials

I created all materials used in this study. This includes address labels, both parent and student consent forms and surveys. I also scheduled and facilitated the focus group. To contact participants interested in the focus group, I created postcards with possible dates. The postcards were self-addressed and stamped for the participant's convenience. On the date of the focus group, I coordinated a note taker, video camera and laptop to be used for recording.

The measuring device used in this study was a survey. There were two surveys created, one for parents and one for students. Both surveys consisted of similar questions, but worded appropriately for the reader. Each survey consisted of 10 questions focused on relationship skills, relationship behaviors while looping at the studied middle school and current relationship behaviors at the district's high school. There were seven yes/no questions (one asked for focus group volunteers), two Likert scale questions ranging from never to always and one question in which the participant identified relationship skills that improved during the 2006-2008 school years. All questions contained a section in which the participant could write open-ended comments. The questions used for the focus group were similar to those on the survey, however, they were all open-ended and forced the participants to elaborate on their answers.

Procedures

Approval was granted from the Augsburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB #2009-46-1) in the spring of 2009. The research began in June of 2009 and was completed in April of 2010. Data was collected by surveys distributed and returned via USPS. The mailings to all possible participants included an introduction letter (Appendix A), a parent consent form (Appendix B), a parent survey (Appendix C), a student consent form (Appendix D) and a student survey (Appendix E). The introduction letter included my background information, purpose for the study and instructions for participation. Surveys were returned via self addressed postage paid envelopes from the months of June to October 2009.

The surveys included a question asking for focus group volunteers. The volunteers were selected and contacted by the researcher via USPS. Only one volunteer was not contacted to participate in the focus group based on negative comments written on their survey regarding the purpose of this study. The participants indicated their availability from two possible selections. All participants available were contacted via email confirming the date, time and location of the focus group. All focus group participants signed a second consent (Appendix F) to participate in the focus group prior to beginning the session.

The focus group was held on a weekday evening and the location was my classroom. The classroom is a rather large room with approximately 30 desks. I arranged the appropriate number of desks in a circle so that all participants could easily see and hear one another. Meeting in the evening also prevented school related distractions. All participants were familiar with the community and the school due to being residents of the community and having children attend the school previously. The focus group questions (Appendix G) were asked in a sequential manner and answered in a discussion style of response. I invited an unbiased assistant

to take notes during the focus group. I also videotaped the entire focus group session for the ability to obtain direct quotes and analyze the emerging themes. It appeared as if all participants were willing to share their looping experience with openness and comfort.

Analysis

I analyzed the survey data first. Upon receiving each participant survey, the data was organized into a single document using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. All data was grouped by question, making all results available and easily accessible. For the question that required an open-ended response, the responses were read individually by me and condensed to a summary or general idea. After reading all responses, categories were formed by ideas that emerged or presented themselves on several of the surveys. These categories became the codes that were used across surveys to designate similar responses. The common responses were color coded to aid qualitative analysis. For closed response questions where participants chose a specific answer, the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Student surveys were also analyzed. Again, the data was organized into a single document using a spreadsheet. All data was grouped by question, making all results available and easily accessible. For the question in the survey that required an open-ended response, the researcher selected ahead of time the two categories of peer relationships and teacher relationships. These categories were chosen based on the purpose of the study and the research question. The two categories were color coded in the spreadsheet for clarity and organization. Again, for closed response questions where specific answers were chosen, the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The descriptive statistics used for closed question analysis includes percentage data calculated individually for each remaining question. The data contains information from 24

parent surveys and 19 student surveys. This raw data was calculated (number of responses divided by total possible responses) and used to provide a more meaningful understanding of the results.

The last collection of data used for analysis was from the focus group. This data was analyzed using notes taken during and after the focus group. Watching the video (DVD format), the researcher expanded the notes from the focus group to elaborate and provide more detail, including direct quotes, on participant responses. This transcription was formatted as a Microsoft Word document. The analysis of the focus group discussion was grounded in the data. Emerging themes found in the surveys are supported by the direct quotes of the focus group participants.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter provides my findings. The findings attempt to answer the research question: what is the impact on the relationships of ninth grade students of participating in a middle school looping program. First, the findings of the student and parent surveys will be presented. This will be followed by the discussion of the content of the focus groups and their related findings. A discussion of the results of the study will be presented in Chapter 5.

Results of the Survey

Two groups, parents and students, completed surveys. Both groups were asked similar questions, worded slightly differently to respect the different perspectives of parents and students. The surveys contained opportunities for open-ended responses and multiple choice or directed responses. The reporting of peer relationships and student-teacher relationships were the main focus of both surveys.

Parent Surveys. Being a parent of a former looping student qualified the participants to be a member of the study. The initial question asked the parents why they decided looping would be beneficial for their student. Three themes emerged from this question. The themes include 1) the impact of the transition from seventh to eighth grade including consistency of teachers and students 2) past experience and prior knowledge and 3) information regarding the teachers who would be members of the team. Twenty-four parent surveys were received and included in the analysis.

Transition and Consistency. By definition, looping is when a group of students and school staff remain grouped together for more than one school year. Looping eliminates the need for students and teachers to get to know each other the first weeks of the second and consecutive

school years. One participant stated, "Efficiency-no need to take time to get to know students and their abilities-it carries over" as her reason for enrolling her student into the looping program. Another parent focused on the academic benefits of looping stating, "I felt it would be beneficial because when 8th grade started she could 'hit the ground running'. She would not have to 'start over.'"

Consistency was another reason several parents chose looping for their student. Several parents responded that having the same teachers and classmates over the course of two years highly attracted them to enrolling their student in the looping program. One parent commented specifically on the connection between consistency and relationships, "I felt that looping with the same teachers would help my daughter make a better relationship with her teachers which would help her learn the material better. She would be more motivated if a solid relationship formed." Another response focused on development of the middle school aged student. "Set a stable social environment during a period of significant physical and mental growth and change."

Past Experience and Knowledge. Several parents had experience to assist them in their decision to place their student in the looping program. The experience included their student looping during elementary grades and also the possibility of other children in the family completing a looping cycle. One parent had both experiences stating, "Past experiences with both [student] and his older sister convinced me that looping has multiplicity of value." A few of the students in this study looped as 3rd and 4th graders. A parent responded, "We had looped in 3rd and 4th grade and had a very good experience with it. [Student] made some very good friendships and enjoyed having the same teachers." Lastly, one of the parents commented on a previous looping experience, but wanted to add, "Our two older children had a difficult time between grades seven and eight at CMS, so it seemed like the right thing to do."

Teachers. Lastly, having background knowledge of the looping teachers was mentioned by several responses as a reason parents chose to enroll their students in the looping program. One parent responded, “I felt [student] would benefit by establishing a relationship with her teachers. I also had been informed that the Amber team teachers were remarkable.” Another wrote, “[Student] is very shy, we thought looping would help her develop a relationship with her teachers. We also had heard wonderful things about the teachers on Amber.” The reputation of the teachers on the team impacted some parent decisions.

Response Data. The survey questions correlating most highly with the research question came from question six on the survey. It reads, “Now that your student is in the 9th grade and no longer teaming with the Amber team students and teachers: a) Have their “best” friends changed? b) Has your student had any difficulties making new friends? c) Has your student had any difficulties building relationships with their teachers?” All three questions were closed and answered with yes or no, although a few responses were inconclusive meaning they could not determine an answer as either yes or no. Table 1 provides the data for all three questions.

Table 1

Results of Parent Responses to Questions 6a-6c

<i>Parent Responses</i>	<i>Question 6a</i>	<i>Question 6b</i>	<i>Question 6c</i>
Yes	7 reponses-29%	0	3 responses-13%
No	13 responses-54%	24 responses-100%	20 responses-83%
Undecided	4 responses-17%	0	1 response-4%

The last question as apart of question 6 on the survey asked, "Would you recommend looping during the 7th and 8th grade years to a 6th grade parent/guardian?" Table 2 provides the responses to this question.

Table 2

Results of Parent Responses to Question 6d

<i>Parent Responses</i>	<i>Question 6d</i>
Yes	20 responses-83%
No	1 response-4%
Undecided	3 responses-13%

Student Surveys. After being identified as a former looping student and therefore qualifying them to be a member of the study, two themes emerged from the student survey. The student survey consisted of more closed questions with the opportunity for comments. The themes focused on peer relationships and student to teacher relationships. Nineteen student surveys were received and included in the analysis.

Students were asked to identify specific skills regarding relationships they felt became stronger while members of the looping team. Table 3 gives the responses from the students. One student refused to answer the question stating it did not pertain to the topic and two students provided “Other” responses.

Table 3

Student Responses to Improved Relationship Skills

<i>Student Responses</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>
Decision Making	13 responses-56.6%
Advocacy	9 responses-39.1%
Conflict Resolution	10 responses-43.5%
Respect for Adults	6 responses-26.1%
Peer Pressure	4 responses-17.4%
Listening	6 responses-26.1%

The two students who provided optional additional responses wrote they learned about themselves, met really good friends, had good relationships with teachers and developed relationships with new people.

Next, students were asked about their current friendships as ninth grade students. The questions focused on whether their friends had changed since leaving the Amber team and whether they had any difficulties making new friends. Students answered yes or no, but had the opportunity to make comments. Table 4 shows the data from these questions.

Table 4

Student Responses to Current 9th Grade Friendships

<i>Student Responses</i>	<i>Question 7a</i>	<i>Question 7b</i>
Yes	4 responses-21%	0
No	15 responses-79%	18 responses-95%
Undecided	0	1 response-5%

In regards to making new friends, student experiences varied and were described in their comments. One student responded her best friends had not changed because “they have always been my friends.” Another response indicated her best friends had not changed but “I have become closer to some people, while others have just lost touch.” Lastly, one student reported her best friends had not changed and the comment said, “I have been able to keep a very good relationships with all of my close friends throughout the years.” Only one student reported they were undecided when asked about difficulties making new friends. The student commented, “slight”.

The second two questions focused on current relationships and were specific to the teacher and the student. The first question asked the student about any difficulties building relationships with their teachers and the second question asked about maintaining those relationships. Again, students were asked to respond yes or no, but had the opportunity to make comments. No students were undecided on this set of questions. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Student Responses to Teacher Relationships

<i>Student Responses</i>	<i>Question 7c</i>	<i>Question 7d</i>
Yes	1 response-5%	1 response-5%
No	18 responses-95%	18 responses-95%

The one student who responded they had difficulty building relationships with their ninth grade teachers commented, “No other teacher is a[s] great as Amber teachers.” The remaining

students responded they have not had difficulty building teacher relationships. One student commented, “Most teachers are willing to talk to you if you are [having difficulties].” Another stated, “I have liked my teachers and have had an easy time adjusting to their teaching styles.”

Again, only one student responded they had difficulty maintaining relationships with their ninth grade teachers. The student did not comment on any questions on their survey. The remaining students responded they did not have difficulties maintaining relationships. One response said, “I am comfortable asking them any questions if I need them.” The only other comment written for this question was, “never had relationship w/them.” As mentioned previously, the majority of the students responded “no” meaning they did not have relationship difficulties with their ninth grade teachers.

The last question students responded to was “would you recommend looping during the 7th and 8th grade school years to a 6th grader?” The majority, 95% of the students, reported they would recommend looping to an incoming 7th grade student. The only student who responded “no”, commented, “I thought it was better to do as an older child.” Table 6 contains the data.

Table 6

Students Responses to Recommending Looping

<i>Student Responses</i>	<i>Question 8</i>
Yes	18 responses-95%
No	1 response

The students who responded they would recommend looping left many comments. The comments often matched the parent themes mentioned earlier in this chapter. A student

commented, “teachers get to know you and you don’t have to start a new relationship with other teachers in 8th grade.” Several students responded similarly regarding the strength of the relationships and increase in tolerance between the peers and the teachers. A couple comments included, “Because you get to know the teachers and people really well” and “you form stronger bonds with your peers and teachers.” Another student focused on the benefits of the team by stating, “It was an incredible experience that really made our color as a whole much closer. We all knew each other very well and loved our teachers!” Lastly, a student gave advice in their comment by stating, “If they signed up w/a friend, then I’d say yes. But they have to understand that they are with the same people for two years and if anyone who causes problems signed up, they should think about it.”

Focus Groups

In the second part of the study, a small group of volunteering parents were members of a focus group. The participants were asked to reflect and share the experience they had while their student was on the looping team.

1. Think of and talk about one difficult situation involving relationships that your student had during their first year at the high school? What do you think prepared them to handle it well? All parents agreed by either their words or their body language that they were unaware of any difficult relationship situations that had taken place. After a long pause, one parent replied, “I don’t know of one.” A second parent responded, “I don’t either.” The remaining participants agreed by briefly commenting or displaying body language supporting the first two parents.

2. Think of and talk about one positive situation involving relationships that your student had during their first year at the high school? What do you think prepared them to handle

it well? The first parent responded by discussing her student and her personality. She reported, “I think my daughter gained a lot of confidence by looping...gave her confidence to be outgoing in class.” In support of this parent’s response, another shared that her student was able to establish friendships more because of being with the same peers over a two-year period. She said,

...he gravitated towards the Amber kids even if they weren’t friendly [at the middle school], if they ended up in a class his freshman year it gave him confidence to make that transition, big high school, lots of people...that connection was helpful to him in that he had closer connections than he would [at the middle school] had he been with them just one year.

The participant continued to include examples and went on to say she

Saw a significant increase in confidence. He had his core group of friends-3 or 4 friends and now in his freshman year, he branched out and took the step and initiated and made contact with them. That’s not how he was in sixth grade.

Lastly, a parent shared that her student has a shy personality and it often takes her daughter longer to get to know others. She elaborated,

My daughter is very quiet and reserved and it takes a long time for people to get to know her and I think it was a big benefit to have two years with the same kids because they sort of get to know her where otherwise they wouldn’t have, probably.

There was one parent who reported they did not feel looping made a difference in her student’s relationships because of their ability to maintain peer relationships outside of the Amber team. She explained,

I don't know that it's really made a huge difference for my daughter in terms of relationships at high school. She had good friends on the Amber Team and they're still good friends, but she also had several really good friends that are not apart of Amber which she has continued to be friends with...I would say that a lot of her closer friends in high school have had more to do with other students. She is involved in extracurricular activities with them.

The idea of extracurricular activities impacting high school friendships received support from other participants. They felt participation in extracurricular activities created a larger friend base for their students. Another participant shared that typically the strong dynamics of the families that chose looping may influence their student's peer relationships. Lastly, a parent shared that prior looping experiences may have also impacted their student.

3. Thinking strictly about positive and healthy relationships, do you think your student's first year at high school was easier, harder, or little change because they were on a looping team at CMS? Why? The researcher skipped this question because it was addressed in question #2. All participants agreed and felt this question was addressed in their prior responses.

4. What advice or suggestions (specific to relationships) would you give to current or future teachers of a looping team at CMS to make the transition to high school easier for the students? One parent responded to this question. She praised the Amber team teachers for the effort above and beyond the normal expectations. She reported,

One comment I have about Amber specifically is...another one of the main reasons we chose to have our kids loop, was specifically [did] because of the teachers on the Amber team...because they are a looping group they are more committed to helping those kids build relationships than teachers on other teams...I know that the Amber teachers did [ya

know] they worked a little harder [ya know, I think] on the end of the year picnic...working on some of the social relationships during the school year where I didn't feel like there was really anything more they could be doing.

She went on to clarify and then share there was a specific incident in the year when a notebook was being passed around. They all agreed the incident occurred and one participant elaborated, the teachers "jumped on that and addressed it very, very quickly. And I think part of the reason for their commitment to that was because [hey] these kids are going to be together for two years and we need to get this in the bed because these relationships need to work." She then reiterated her praise to the Amber teachers for their extra work with the team. Upon inquiring, no further responses were spoken from other parents, however, their body language supported the response.

5. Many survey responses indicated parents chose looping for their student because of what it meant to them for a teacher to make a 2-year commitment with a group of students. If you thought about this, can you tell me more about your thinking? Responses to this question were very detailed and specific. The first response discussed they wanted consistency of teachers. She stated,

I chose it more for the consistency that my kid would get from the teacher...there's good teachers and not quite as good teachers and I felt it was more that they would get that teacher for two years not solely that those teachers were superior teachers...some of it was teacher avoidance.

A second participant spoke briefly about the elimination of the anxiety of not knowing which teachers their child would get if they did not loop. She said,

It was a huge benefit to be able to meet the teachers in advance, know who they were going to be, talk to parents who had older kids, kinda get the scoop on what they thought about those teachers and I identified that Amber was a really good team of teachers... Therefore, the ability to know their child's teachers in advance and also know those teachers reputation encouraged the choice to loop.

The next parent spoke strongly about the student to teacher relationship and the important skills their student developed while being a student on the Amber team. She started by saying,

I really think the student to the teacher thing [relationship] is huge and I think the looping experience really gave them [student] a very strong skill set on how to interface with teachers in positive and negative situations and the Amber teachers were very open and because they wanted a relationship...they cultivated a really open communication. [The] kids figured out they could talk to their teachers, they could ask questions, they need to do it respectfully...and I think that's huge because you go to the high school and you have them for an hour and 90 minutes for a quarter...you don't connect with those teachers very well. I just think the deeper relationships that they had [while looping] with their teachers really helped their relationships with their teachers at the high school and I think that's as important as their peer relationships.

The last parent to speak reiterated the importance of the teacher relationships. She spoke of the transition to high school. She mentioned that when her daughter started high school she missed the relationships she had while being apart of the Amber team. She mentioned "[The teacher relationships were] important to her but she had a couple teachers right away [at high school] that she was able to have a relationship with so that helped to a point but I do think she missed it [relationships at the middle school]."

Small conversations took place reiterating the responses. Mostly discussing the two-year relationship and what that meant for their students. One parent repeated the transition time between seventh and eighth grade was noticeably better in regards to the relationships because the teachers and students already knew each other.

6. My research topic was suggested to me by the CMS principals. During parent meetings regarding looping, the following question is frequently asked. If you had to prepare an answer, how would you respond? *If students remain with the same group of students and teachers for two academic years, how does this impact their relationships and transitions to the high school?* The responses by parents were minimal. A positive response shared by a parent was their student learned teamwork within smaller groups.

One thing I observed about looping was the teamwork that was done in smaller groups, whether it was done on a project, lots of times our kids are so crazy about that...so they don't really like it and I felt that with that group, they pull together and they mix and match, and the teachers would mix and match probably wisely because they knew the kids well and they could have some good group experiences...comfortable dealing with them and working with different people.

In general, this participant felt if a student is not looping, they would be with different peers throughout the two years, but the looping creates the small group environment.

An additional comment came from a former Amber student. Even though I was unable to generate enough participants for a student focus group, I want to include her comment here because her perspective is important. The student was present and spoke at the parent focus group. She elaborated about being able to begin high school with a solid group of friends. The connection of being a member of the Amber team was a conversation starter at the high

school. “You have a solid group of friends going on to high school...if I was in class...it wasn’t hard to make connections, oh, you’re in Amber and it was an easy topic to bring up. You say hi in the hallways and you don’t feel like you are alone at the high school.” The student to teacher relationship remained an unchanged concern from the looping team to the high school. “The teachers...I knew the teachers going into Amber... and when I got to know them, they were my favorite teachers that I had, so just going through that teacher experience and then to high school, it’s pretty much the same kind of teachers teaching me.” When asked if her overall transition to high school went well, the participant concurred.

7. Would you recommend looping at CMS to another person? The participants were prepared to answer this question and did so with a mixture of thoughts. The comments made it clear the decision is ultimately made by the parents to loop or not to loop. The first comment reiterated they selected looping based on the teachers. The participant specifically said, “we primarily chose it for who was teaching, if it was not a good group of teachers, we wouldn’t have done it.” She added, if possible, her daughter would have stayed with the Amber team longer than the two-year tenure.

Is there an ideal student for looping? Academically, the participants felt it was good for all students. A participant stated, “...academically, I think it’s really strong. So, I can’t say they’re introverted or extroverted, or a slow learner or fast learner, I just think for all kids, if the situation is right and they have the relationships then the looping part is a benefit.” The participants reported that students with high social anxiety, the need for stability and strong teachers were key in their decision-making. High anxiety students were able to develop self-confidence in their relationships and in school transition. Speaking specifically to the relationships, a parent stated, “Relationship... is secondary to [the] academic piece”. The same

parent also commented that a student who takes time to build a relationship would benefit from looping. “Once connected, they shine.” Overall, looping was a good positive experience for middle school and “it outweighs any concerns about going to high school.”

On the negative side, looping would not be a good fit for a student who changes friends quickly. The idea of staying with same peers and teachers over a two-year period could be detrimental and frustrating. An additional comment by a participant added insight into the thought that looping is beneficial for some students and not others. She said, “Daughter loved it and never wanted it to end. Son is tired of the teachers and ready to be done.” Lastly, a parent classified one of the team teachers as a weakness. She reported that unfortunately that subject remains challenging for her student in high school. In the end, parents chose looping because it was the best choice for their student through the middle school years, not because they were trying to prepare them for high school.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of relationships after students participated in a looping program during their seventh and eighth grade school years. These students had the same peers and teachers on their team for the duration of the two school years. Upon completion of eighth grade, the majority of the students chose to attend the district's high school. At the high school, there are approximately 3000 students and 250 teachers. For this reason, many parents in the district question whether the transition from looping to the high school could be difficult in regards to relationships. The study was suggested by the middle school administration to help answer this question.

The methods for answering this question included surveys and a parent focus group. The survey was conducted during the summer after the looping students completed their 9th grade year at the high school. Two separate surveys were written, one for students and one for their parents. The surveys contained both open ended and multiple-choice questions focusing on the student's past and current relationships with their peers and teachers. A focus group was conducted with parents who volunteered. Again, questions pertaining to the student's relationships were asked during an evening session. The surveys and focus group were used in the results of this study.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the student responses were overwhelmingly positive. Students reported with confidence they had healthy and positive peer relationships while being a member of the Amber team. In addition, the students also reported healthy and positive relationships with their

teachers. While at the high school, almost all students reported they did not have difficulty making new friends. Almost all students surveyed did not feel they had any difficulties building or maintaining relationships with their new teachers. Lastly, almost all of the students would recommend looping in seventh and eighth grade to a current sixth grade student. In summary, student responses were positive and support that idea that looping students have the ability to create and maintain healthy relationships at the high school.

Parent surveys revealed similar responses and supported the results of their students. All parents reported their students did not have difficulty meeting new friends and beginning new relationships during their first year at the high school. Specific to teacher relationships, parents reported a slightly lower, but still significant majority of their students did not have difficulty building and maintaining relationships with their new teachers at the high school. Overall, according to the parents, their students did not have significant difficulties transitioning from the looping team to the high school.

Conclusions

In the end all three parts of the study: parent surveys, student surveys and the parent focus group provided adequate information to answer the research question of whether or not looping at the middle school impacts a students ability to create and maintain healthy relationships with their peers and teachers at the high school.

Parent Surveys. In the parent surveys (Appendix C), three themes for why they chose looping emerged including the impact of the transition, experience and prior knowledge, and information about the team's teachers. The transition from seventh to eighth grade was reported to be less stressful for the students. In the second year of looping, less time was spent with peers and teachers getting to know each other and consistency was provided from year to year. Experience

was another factor. Many of the students had looped in elementary or the parent had another child who had chosen a looping experience. They liked it then and were willing to try it again. Lastly, the parents had knowledge of the teachers who would be members of the looping team. The reputation of the teachers played a vital role in the decision to have their child loop.

While it is evident why parents chose looping, the impact of looping on the actual transition to high school is less clear. Over half of the parents reported their student's "best" friends had not changed through their first year of high school. All parents reported their students were able to make new friends at the high school. This data supported that the students were able to adjust and create new friendships with their peers. Specific to teacher relationships, the majority of the parents, with the exception of three, reported their students did not have any difficulties building new relationships with their teachers. Again, this supports the idea that students are able to transition well to the high school. Based on the data collected in this study, it is unknown whether or not the looping students would have transitioned as well had they not been a member of the looping team. What I can conclude is the students on the looping team had very few difficulties with the transition. .

Student Surveys. The student surveys (Appendix E) also provided valuable information.

Students reported relationship skills improved while being a looping student and member of the Amber team. The top two skills were decision-making and conflict resolution. These skills are life skills and benefit initiating and maintaining healthy relationships. There are two reasons for growth in the areas of decision-making and conflict resolution. The first being the age of development of the students. Middle school students often show growth in these areas naturally. Secondly, the teachers and staff members who are leading the looping team take the extra steps to ensure these students have increased exposure to life skills. They coordinate extra team days

that include team building and opportunities for students to interact positively. At the end of the year, the team hosts a celebration that includes pictures, videos, awards, and contests. All of these additional team events may lead to increased life skills development.

The parents and student survey outcomes were very similar. The majority of the students reported their friends had not changed since leaving the middle school and more importantly, all but one student reported they were able to make new friends without difficulties. This data supports that students are able to build and maintain new peer relationships after being members of a looping team. The data for teacher relationships was identical to their peers. Only one student reported they had difficulty building and maintaining relationships with their high school teachers. This data nearly unanimously supports the fact that students are able to build and maintain relationships with their teachers after the experience with looping.

Students fully supported the looping program while at the middle school. When asked if they would recommend looping to an incoming sixth grader, again, all but one student reported they would recommend looping.

Parent Focus Group. The last source of data was the parent focus group. The parents openly discussed their student's relationships with their peers and teachers. Parents discussed increased confidence, the ability for shy students to work on having a voice, and the impact of extracurricular activities. Additionally, parents voiced their respect and thankfulness to the teachers of the Amber team. They reported they went above the normal teacher expectations to facilitate and teach healthy relationship skills. The students were faced with both positive and negative situations and the teachers gave them a skill set for handling each situation appropriately. The parents also reiterated the consistency was good for their student and the transition from seventh to eighth grade was a smooth process.

Lastly, parents once again reported during the focus group they would recommend looping to an incoming sixth grade student and their parent/guardians. The Amber team teachers were a strong attraction to the parents along with the academic benefits of looping. The parents felt the academic benefits led to confidence in relationships and overall success. The positive experiences led to less concern about the transition to high school. The parents of the focus group felt their students were prepared for the transition.

Recommendations

The results of this study will be useful to this middle school and other middle schools that have looping programs. Parents may use this research when considering whether or not to place their student in the looping program. The parental concern of how looping affects their student's relationships can be generally answered within this study.

The administration of schools with looping programs may use this research to address parent questions regarding the possible implications of placing their child in a looping program. Historically at this middle school, a parent meeting is held that provides information on looping. According to our current administration, parents often have questions regarding the impact of looping on academics and relationships. This research provides administration with answers regarding the typical experience of students with looping.

The teachers of the looping team may use this knowledge to continue or improve the teaching of relationship skills to students while they are members of the looping team. Teachers should continue to maintain a high level of focus on conflict resolution and communication with students. The ability for students to approach and discuss their needs with their teachers becomes even more important at the high school level. Looping teachers should understand that

learning to build relationships with teachers is a vital co-curricular aspect of the middle school experience.

Limitations of the Study

The study focused specifically on student relationships and the transition to the high school in a suburban community. The participants were a group of approximately 150 students and all members of one team at the middle school. At the time of the study there were ten teams at the school. The sample size was rather small given the total number of students and parents within the team. Approximately 20 student surveys and 25 parent surveys were returned, translating to about 15% participation. A larger population may have resulted in different outcomes.

Additionally, the focus group had minimal participation. There were eight participants, all mothers of students from the Amber team. Only one focus group was held due to the low level of volunteers to participate. The student focus group was not held due to the fact that students did not volunteer for the focus group. After analyzing the surveys, the focus group questions were adapted for the parent only group.

Further research is needed on this topic. I would suggest repeating the study using different schools and looping programs. Specific possibilities are another suburban school and an urban school with increased diversity. Additionally, some middle schools house three grade levels. Would looping for three years at the middle school level impact relationships at the high school? Repeating this research with a three year looping program may also provide answers regarding relationships. Additionally, repeating this study with the other looping team in this school could also be beneficial for comparison data specific to this middle school. Lastly, I think

an increase in sample size may provide more details and answers regarding the effects of looping on student relationships.

CHAPTER 6

Personal Reflection

My favorite quote in its modern translation is by William Hickson and he said, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again”. I looked up the history of this quote, and it applies flawlessly to this paper. This proverb traces back to an American educator by the name of Thomas H. Palmer in 1840 and an English novelist Frederick Maryat in 1847. The original quote is “Tis a lesson you should heed: Try, try, again” and was used to encourage American school children to complete their homework. Drawing on this quote, I have tried and tried again and now have completed my homework.

Accomplishment and Meaning

This accomplishment satisfies another goal in my life. My graduation from high school in 1998 started my career as a student and a professional. I was well aware a Bachelors degree in Psychology was going to require me to pursue further education. I wasn’t sure when that would happen, but I assumed it would be sooner rather than later. I spent approximately two years following the completion of my undergraduate degree thinking about the next chapter in my life. I had been a Treatment Counselor at a facility for children and adolescents with mental illness. I decided to move and accepted a position as a Group Home Supervisor. My search for more education began as I had reached a level in my field where I felt I couldn’t achieve career goals without further education. I began researching programs and careers and quickly found myself at Augsburg pursuing a Master’s degree in Education. This degree allows me to advance my career goals and therefore continue to lead a meaningful and driven life.

Process

The task of completing this project does not come without hard work, dedication and drive. I'll refer back to Hickson's quote, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again". I have passion and purpose in my topic of looping and student relationships. More specifically, my passion is the belief that I'm assisting in an area of education where I have first hand experience and answering a question that is being asked in my district. In the beginning, the work was driven by attending class and still being a frequent face on campus. As I became disconnected with my peers and professors, the work became harder to continue. Once my data collection was done, I had what I needed and I knew the answer to my research question, yet the hard work of writing about it was still in front of me.

Chapter by chapter I started to write with month's in-between each draft. It was hard to maintain focus and life was getting in the way. I kept setting short-term goals and missing them, it just wasn't me. Then the opportunity came to have support from Augsburg to finish this project. I was in the middle of chapter 4 and knew this was my calling to finish. One of the first pieces of advice was to take all my separate chapter files and put them into the final paper template. It was that day that I saw the end in sight. It came together and it felt and looked like an action research paper. In the end, my process was not flawless, but these means were the way to my goal. Achievement was possible.

Learned about Me

Learning is a lifetime endeavor. When I began this project, I thought it would be another step-by-step process I would take in order to fulfill the completion of my degree. However, it has gone deeper and further than completing a requirement. I've found myself emotionally attached to my work. I can tell others the story of what I did and what I answered. I'm in a

helping profession and I've done something to help my school, specifically, the teachers of looping teams and administration. In the end though, I've helped the students. I do not go to work everyday for my peers or my administration; I go to work for the students. The students at the middle school ages need math, English, science, social studies, quarter classes, music, world language and life long social skills. Where's the class entitled social skills? There is not one because it's expected to be integrated into every classroom throughout the building. My research means something. It means the students need assistance navigating through social situations including relationships skills with both their peers and their teachers. Relationships skills are not just meant to survive high school, they are necessary for a lifetime.

In the end, I have learned I have the passion to persist and am filled with happiness and achievement. I have not only persevered at the task of earning my Master's degree in Education, but doing it with the intent of helping others. It meets my personality right in the middle. I always have a goal, now I need to start thinking about what's next. Certainly, one requirement is that is must be something just as rewarding.

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Appendix A: Introduction Letter

June 1, 2009

Dear 2006-2008 CMS Amber Team Student, Parent and/or Guardian,

Greetings! My name is Tara Martinson and I am currently an 8th grade math teacher at Central Middle School in Eden Prairie. I am also a graduate student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis working towards completion of my Master's Degree in Education. As a fulfillment of my degree, I must compose, conduct, and analyze action research purposeful to the field of education.

In partnership with the Amber Team Teachers and Eden Prairie Schools Administration, I have chosen to research The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a Looping Program. Because records have indicated that you were a part of the 2006-2008 Amber Team, I am asking for your cooperation and participation in this study. Upon consent to participate, I will be asking for the completion of a 10-minute survey. I will also be asking for volunteers to participate in small and brief focus groups at a later date (probably late summer/early fall). Participation in the focus groups will be strictly voluntary.

If you choose to participate, enclosed you will find two consents (one for your student and one for parent/guardians) to participate in this study. Please read carefully and provide your signatures in the appropriate locations. I would encourage both groups to participate, but will accept one consent without the other. After consenting, please respectfully complete the parent/guardian and the student surveys. Once completed, please return the consent forms and surveys to me in the postage paid envelope at your earliest convenience. I will look forward to receiving them.

Thank you in advance. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 952-975-2672 or by email martinst@augsborg.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Tara Martinson

Appendix B: Parent Consent Form

The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a
Middle School Looping Program
INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
PARENT/GUARDIAN

Introduction:

I am currently a math teacher at Central Middle School in Eden Prairie, Minnesota and a graduate student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. You were selected and are being invited to be a possible participant in my graduate research because your student was a member of the 2006-2008 Amber Team at Central Middle School. My research study is on the impact of relationships following participation in a middle school looping program. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine if being a member of a looping team at the middle school grades (7-8) has impacted your student's ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships in the ninth grade.

Procedures:

If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete a 10 minute survey. You may also be chosen and asked to participate in a focus group at a later date. A focus group is a small discussion lasting 30-60 minutes and consisting of peers (5-7 people). The discussion is facilitated by the principal researcher. If chosen, your participation in the focus group will not be required.

Risks and Benefits of Being in this Study:

The study has minimal risks. In the event that this research activity results in the need for psychological counseling, please contact the counseling office at either Central Middle School (952-975-7330) or Eden Prairie High School (952-975-8021).

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. Participation is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason.

Indirect benefits to participation are potentially new findings leading to the greater understanding of the effects of looping on student's relationships during the transition year from middle school to high school (9th grade).

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only Ms. Martinson's advisor, Vicki Olson, and Ms. Martinson will have access to the data and/or recordings. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While Ms. Martinson will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Ms. Martinson will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2009 and will destroy all original reports, identifying information, and recordings that can be linked back to you following January 1, 2013.

Participants consenting to participation in this study should be aware that information gathered may be included in the action research and distributed and/or presented to the Augsburg College Action Research Symposium and Central Middle School (Eden Prairie, Minnesota). A copy of the final project will be given to the Augsburg College Library.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Tara Martinson, Augsburg College, or Eden Prairie Schools in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tara Martinson at martinst@augsborg.edu or 952-975-2672. If you have other question or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than Ms. Martinson, you may also contact Vicki Olson, Advisor and Professor, at olsonv@augsborg.edu .

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or had it read to me. I have received answers to questions. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Permission to Include Responses:

Your signature indicates that you grant Ms. Martinson permission to quote statements from interviews /surveys in the research. Even after signing this form, please know that you may state that specific statements are not to be quoted or withdraw any statements from the study at any time. I consent to have interview/survey responses included in the research.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C: Parent Survey

Survey Questions for Parents

Study: The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a Middle School Looping Program

Your Name _____ **Student's Name** _____

Directions: Please complete each question as thoroughly as possible. Please feel free to use the back or attach additional sheets if necessary. If at anytime you wish to discontinue the survey, please return the survey in the enclosed envelope and clearly state you have chosen to withdraw from the study.

1. Was your student a member of the CMS Amber team during both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years? Yes or No. If No, you can stop the survey.

2. Was your student voluntarily a member of the Amber team their 7th and 8th grade years at CMS (did you chose for them to loop)? Yes or No

If yes, why did you feel looping would be beneficial to your student?

3. Would you describe your student's relationships with their peers on the Amber team as healthy and positive?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Comments _____

4. Would you describe your student's relationships with their Amber team teachers as healthy and positive?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Comments _____

5. What specific relationships skills do you feel became stronger while your student was a member of the Amber Team? (Circle all that apply.)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Decision Making | Peer Pressure (influences their decision making) |
| Advocacy (sticking up for themselves and/or others) | Listening |
| Conflict Resolution (solving problems with peers) | Other _____ |
| Respect for adults/authority figures | Other _____ |

6. Now that your student is in the 9th grade and no longer teaming with the Amber Team students and teachers:

a. Have their "best" friends changed? Yes or No

Comments _____

b. Has your student had any difficulties making new friends? Yes or No

Comments _____

c. Has your student had any difficulties building relationships with their teachers? Yes or

No

Comments _____

7. **Would you recommend looping during the 7th and 8th grade years to a 6th grade parent/guardian at Oak Point? Yes or No**

Why or why not?

8. **Would you be willing to participate in a focus group (casual discussion with other parent/guardians) on these specific topics? Yes or No**

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix D: Student Consent Form

The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a
Middle School Looping Program

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

STUDENT

Introduction:

I am currently a math teacher at Central Middle School in Eden Prairie, Minnesota and a graduate student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Your child has been selected and is being invited to be a possible participant in my graduate research because they were a member of the 2006-2008 Amber Team at Central Middle School. My research study is on the impact of relationships following participation in a middle school looping program. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine if being a member of a looping team at the middle school grades (7-8) has impacted your student's ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships in the ninth grade.

Procedures:

If you are willing to participate, your student will be asked to complete a 10 minute survey. Your student may also be chosen and asked to participate in a focus group at a later date. A focus group is a small discussion lasting 30-60 minutes and consisting of peers (5-7 people). The discussion is facilitated by the principal researcher. If chosen, your student's participation in the focus group will not be required.

Risks and Benefits of Being in this Study:

The study has minimal risks. In the event that this research activity results in the need for

psychological counseling, please contact the counseling office at either Central Middle School (952-975-7330) or Eden Prairie High School (952-975-8021).

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. Participation is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason.

Indirect benefits to participation are potentially new findings leading to the greater understanding of the effects of looping on students relationships during the transition year from middle school to high school (9th grade).

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only Ms. Martinson's advisor, Vicki Olson, and Ms. Martinson will have access to the data and/or recordings. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While Ms. Martinson will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Ms. Martinson will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2009 and will destroy all original reports, identifying information, and recordings that can be linked back to you or your student following January 1, 2013.

Participants consenting to participation in this study should be aware that information gathered may be included in the action research and distributed and/or presented to the Augsburg College Action Research Symposium and Central Middle School (Eden Prairie, Minnesota). A copy of this research will be given to the Augsburg College Library.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current

or future relations with Tara Martinson, Augsburg College, or Eden Prairie Schools in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tara Martinson at martinst@augsborg.edu or 952-975-2672. If you have other question or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than Ms. Martinson, you may also contact Vicki Olson, Advisor and Professor, at olsonv@augsborg.edu .

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or had it read to me. I have received answers to questions. I consent to participate in this study.

Consent of Parent/Guardian Date

Assent of Student Date

Permission to Include Responses:

Your signature indicates that you grant Ms. Martinson permission to quote statements from interviews /surveys in the research. Even after signing this form, please know that you may state that specific statements are not to be quoted or withdraw any statements from the study at any time. I consent to have interview/survey responses included in the research.

Consent of Parent/Guardian Date

Assent of Student Date

Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix E: Student Survey

Survey Questions for Students

Study: The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a Middle School Looping Program

Your Name _____ **Parent/Guardian's Name** _____

Directions: Please complete each question as thoroughly as possible. Please feel free to use the back or attach additional sheets if necessary. If at anytime you wish to discontinue the survey, please return the survey in the enclosed envelope and clearly state you have chosen to withdraw from the study.

1. Were you a member of the CMS Amber team during both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years? Yes or No If no, you can stop this survey now.

2. Prior to starting your 7th grade year at CMS, did you choose to be on a looping team? Yes or No

If no, were you assigned to the Amber team randomly? Yes or No

If no, why did you choose to stay on the Amber team for your 8th grade year?

3. Would you describe your relationships with your peers who were also members of the Amber team and healthy and positive?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Comments _____

4. If you had a conflict with a peer on the Amber Team, would you try to handle the situation without involving help from school teachers/counselors?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Comments _____

5. Overall, would you describe your relationships with your Amber team teachers as healthy and positive?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Comments _____

6. Please identify 2-3 specific skills regarding relationships that you feel became stronger while you were a member of the Amber team? (Circle all that apply.)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Decision Making | Peer Pressure (influences your decision making) |
| Advocacy (sticking up for yourself and/or others) | Listening |
| Conflict Resolution (solving problems with peers) | Other _____ |
| Respect for adults/authority figures | Other _____ |
| | Other _____ |

7. Now that you are at high school and no longer teaming with Amber team students and teachers:

a. Have your closest 2 or 3 friends changed? Yes or No

Comments _____

b. Have you had any difficulties making new friends? Yes or No

Comments _____

c. Have you had any difficulties building relationships with your teachers? Yes or No

Comments _____

d. Have you had any difficulties maintaining relationships with your teachers? Yes or No

Comments _____

8. Would you recommend looping during the 7th and 8th grade school years to a 6th grader at Oak Point? Yes or No

Why or why not? _____

9. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group (casual discussion with other students) on these specific topics? Yes or No

Thanks you for your time and participation.

Appendix F: Parent Focus Group Consent Form

The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a
Middle School Looping Program
INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (FOCUS GROUP)
PARENT/GUARDIAN

Introduction:

I am currently a math teacher at Central Middle School in Eden Prairie, Minnesota and a graduate student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. You were selected and are being invited to be a possible participant in my graduate research because your student was a member of the 2006-2008 Amber Team at Central Middle School. My research study is on the impact of relationships following participation in a middle school looping program. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine if being a member of a looping team at the middle school grades (7-8) has impacted your student's ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships in the ninth grade.

Procedures:

If you are willing to participate, you are agreeing to participate in a focus group. A focus group is a small discussion lasting 30-60 minutes and consisting of peers (5-7 people). The discussion is facilitated by the principal researcher and all questions will pertain to the research topic.

Risks and Benefits of Being in this Study:

The study has minimal risks. In the event that this research activity results in the need for psychological counseling, please contact the counseling office at either Central Middle School (952-975-7330) or Eden Prairie High School (952-975-8021).

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. Participation is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason.

Indirect benefits to participation are potentially new findings leading to the greater understanding of the effects of looping on student's relationships during the transition year from middle school to high school (9th grade).

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study will be kept confidential. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only Ms. Martinson's advisor, Vicki Olson, and Ms. Martinson will have access to the data and/or recordings. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While Ms. Martinson will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Ms. Martinson will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2009 and will destroy all original reports, identifying information, and recordings that can be linked back to you following January 1, 2013.

Participants consenting to participation in this study should be aware that information gathered may be included in the action research and distributed and/or presented to the Augsburg College Action Research Symposium and Central Middle School (Eden Prairie, Minnesota). A copy of the final project will be given to the Augsburg College Library.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Tara Martinson, Augsburg College, or Eden Prairie Schools in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tara Martinson at martinst@augsborg.edu or 952-975-2672. If you have other question or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than Ms. Martinson, you may also contact Vicki Olson, Advisor and Professor, at olsonv@augsborg.edu .

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or had it read to me. I have received answers to questions. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Permission to Participate in a Focus Group:

I consent to participate in a focus group and to be recorded.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Permission to Include Responses:

Your signature indicates that you grant Ms. Martinson permission to quote statements from interviews /surveys in the research. Even after signing this form, please know that you may state that specific statements are not to be quoted or withdraw any statements from the study at any time.

I consent to have interview/survey responses included in the research.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix G: Parent Focus Group Questions

Possible Focus Group Questions for Parents

Study: The Impact on the Relationships of Ninth Grade Students after Participating in a Middle School Looping Program

Changes and/or additional questions may be necessary to allow for follow-up to survey questions.

1. What was your favorite thing about being a parent of a student on a looping team at CMS? Why do you think that is?

2. What was your least favorite thing about being a parent of a student on a looping team at CMS? Why do you think that is?

3. What would you say your student learned most about relationships from their experience as a member of a looping team?

4. Do you think looping helped or hurt your student's ability to currently initiate and maintain healthy relationships?

5. Think of and talk about one difficult situation involving relationships that your student had during their first year at the high school?

6. Think of and talk about one positive situation involving relationships that your student had during their first year at the high school? What do you think prepared them to handle it well?

7. Thinking strictly about positive and healthy relationships, do you think your student's first year at high school was easier or harder because they were on a looping team while they were at CMS? Why?
8. What advice (specific to relationships) would you give to current teachers of a looping team at CMS?
9. What advice (specific to relationships) would you give to current students of a looping team at CMS?
10. What advice (specific to relationships) would you give to current parents of a looping team at CMS?
11. Would you recommend looping at CMS to another parent? Why or why not?