

On Looping

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Last summer Alan Finder of *The New York Times* wrote about the benefits of “looping,” a practice in which a teacher follows a class for a number of years. “Having a teacher stay with a class for more than a year—or looping, as it is known—is on the rise, according to many experts. As educational innovations go, it is remarkably simple. So are its benefits, proponents say. Teachers get to know their students, and the students’ parents, extremely well. They know each child’s strengths and weaknesses, and the children know the teachers’ expectations and methods.”¹

Finder then lists public schools and school districts across the country that practice “looping.” He notes that this practice helps “schools improve their standardized test scores.”² He supports this claim with the suggestion that by having the same students, teachers do not have to continually assess them and can instead pay more immediate attention to their individual needs. He could have added that when these needs are met, the stress on children and teachers caused by persistent testing is no longer so prevalent.

Another reason Finder gives to support “looping” is that anxiety is reduced in the children at the beginning and end of the school year: “Research into looping suggests that it can pay substantial dividends. The school district in East Cleveland, Ohio, experimented with looping from 1993 to 1997. A class in each of four elementary schools stayed with their teachers for three years, generally from kindergarten through second grade. The teachers worked extensively with parents to reinforce lessons in school, and the classes also met for five weeks each summer.

“After three years, students in the looped classes scored an average of twenty-five per-

centage points higher on standardized tests in reading, language arts and math than other students in the school district, said Frederick M. Hampton, an associate professor of education at Cleveland State University who oversaw the research project.”³

Even with these encouraging results, the East Cleveland School district stopped the program after 1997 because of new administration and complaints from some teachers that they were being required to learn the curriculum for a new grade. The school bureaucracy did not acknowledge the benefits of looping but instead focused on efficiency and maintaining the status quo.

The complete article can be found on the website of the Research Institute at www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org.

References

1. Alan Finder, *The New York Times*, “Goodbye, Class. See You in the Fall,” July 11, 2005.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.