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The effectiveness of looping in self-contained special education classrooms

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**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOOPING IN SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION
CLASSROOMS**

by
Gena K. Orazi

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Psychology
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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at
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Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, PhD

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my fiancé who has been my greatest support, Gregory Pacitto

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I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Robert Dihoff and Dr. Terri Allen for their help and guidance throughout my research.

Abstract

Gena K. Orazi

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOOPING IN SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

2011/12

Roberta Dihoff, PhD.

Master of Arts in School Psychology

The practice of looping, a single teacher remaining with a core group of students for two or more years, is one that is used in some self-contained special education settings. The purpose of this study was to show that this practice is beneficial to both teacher and students in this type of environment. The goal of this investigation was to demonstrate that looping in a self-contained classroom resulted in significant academic achievement gains and also decreased behavior infractions of the students in this type of classroom. Also, it was hypothesized that the students who have been looped in a self-contained special education classroom for two years and only commit minor behavior infractions will show higher academic gains than students who commit major behavior infractions. Scores from the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition, and behavioral referrals were analyzed from middle school students who were looped for two consecutive years in one New Jersey middle school. The results of the data indicated that the students did make significant academic gains in the area of Reading Comprehension. Also, the students who achieved the most significant gains in Mathematics were those who did not commit major behavior infractions. Behavior infraction from year 1 to year 2 did not change. Even so, these results indicate that this practice is one that is beneficial for special education students, and it promotes education

and positive behavior in the classroom. Implications of the future practice of looping in special education classrooms were discussed.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the education system, experts are constantly searching for answers to poor performance in the classroom and behavioral issues. Academic achievement in the classroom is central to future success (Valiente et al., 2008). New initiatives are being enforced in the schools to improve motivation in academics and also positive behavior. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to come up with different procedures and policies that will inspire change in the students. Many schools have established learning communities, especially in the middle school and high school levels. These communities are comprised of the same group of teachers, several for each grade level and subject. The students stay in that particular learning community year to year and may have a couple of the same teachers in the next grade level. The special education population many times, is included in these small learning communities. Many schools have begun the practice of looping with their students in self-contained classrooms, particularly middle schools. In a looping model in a middle school setting, a self-contained special education teacher will teach the same group of students for the entirety of their schooling at that particular institution. The teacher will be responsible for teaching the four major subjects, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, for each grade level.

Recently a district in the South Jersey area began the practice of looping in the Special Education system. An interview was conducted with the Supervisor of Special Education to determine the goals and perceived outcomes of this initiative. In summary she shared that the district decided to begin the practice of looping in the special education classrooms after compiling research from the Association of Middle Level

Education. She expressed that the district felt that the advantages included the relationships that occur between the teachers, students, and families. Looping also provides additional time, which in turn, enhances instruction. Relationships, primarily teacher-student, benefit from the stability afforded by looping. Finally, year to year the teacher does not lose instructional time getting to know their students' strengths, weaknesses, and academic levels. Looping increases engagement between teacher, students, and parents and increases the students' social development and allows students to become familiar and comfortable with the teacher's behavior management style.

The purpose of this study was to examine the practice of looping in a particular school and determine if there was a significant effect on the areas of academic gains and behavior issues. There are advantages and disadvantages to the process of looping, as there are in any educational initiative, and this study attempted to show that the positive aspects outweigh the negative. This study was implemented based on the need for the continuation of the practice of looping. Looping promotes positive student-teacher relationships. A positive and familiar relationship with the teacher allows for positive academic growth (Valiente et al., 2008). Furthermore, the relationship between teacher and student can be a factor in behavior issues in the classroom (Baker et al., 2008). These ideas will be examined in further detail in the Literature Review.

Hypothesis 1: Students who have been looped in a self-contained special education classroom for two years or more will show significant academic gains and only minor behavior infractions as opposed to major behavioral incidents.

Hypothesis 2: Students who have been looped in a self-contained special education classroom for two years and only commit minor behavior infractions will show higher academic gains than students who commit major behavior infractions.

Operational Definitions:

Looping- remaining with a core group of students and a single teacher for multiple years (Nichols, 2001).

Self-Contained Classroom- A classroom, in which the students have the same teacher for every major subject (Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies). Normally, this term is used in reference to special education.

Major Behavior Infractions- A formal behavior write up that includes incident involving physical contact or verbal assault on another student or disrespect to a person in authority.

Minor Behavior Infractions- Behaviors that occur in a classroom that the teacher deals with on an everyday basis and do not warrant a formal write up.

Assumptions

This study was conducted based on the assumption that the archival data gathered was data of students that were accurately classified in the special education department. Also it was based on the assumption that the KTEA II assessment scores used in the data collection were reliable and valid and the teachers administering the test followed the necessary protocols and scored them correctly. Finally, it was based on the assumption that the teachers were objective in their decisions about what warranted a formal behavior write up.

Limitations

There are some possible limitations of this study. This particular school district has only been enforcing the practice of looping for five years. The archival data that will be examined will only be used if the student has been with the same teacher for two years or more. Due to some scheduling conflicts and the short amount of time since the implementation of this initiative, the sample size will be small. Another limitation involves the test measure that was used in examining academic gains. The KTEA-II is administered by the special education classroom teacher and there could be discrepancies when the protocol is given or scored by different teachers in different settings. Also the teachers that are classifying their behavior infractions in their classrooms may have different views on behavior policy and what constitutes a behavior infraction.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Special Education- A Brief History

Before the 1970's, children with special needs either received inadequate services or were refused by public schools altogether. These millions of children were referred to as "uneducable." Most assume that rights for students with disabilities were implemented solely due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Public Law No. 94-142, 1975), but there were several prior court cases that influenced that statute. The pivotal *Mills vs. Board of Education* (1972) case ruled that children with disabilities had as much of a right to an education as students without special needs. In 1975, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed. All students with disabilities were now to be granted a free, appropriate public education. It was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990 (Martin et al., 1996).

Under this mandate, the services provided to children with special needs are "designed to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living" (Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act, 2004). Teachers of special education are expected to service their students by providing them with strategies to better understand the curriculum of their public institution (Morgan et al., 2010). By teaching students in this manner, they will have increased future opportunities in society and education (Batmen & Linden, 2006). IDEA has several important mandates that are critical elements. If a child is suspected of having a disability, they are not to be classified or put in a different program until they are fully evaluated. Once it is determined that they require special services they must be reevaluated at least every three years or when

needed. There are also protections in place for parents in IDEA. They are to be notified of meetings, and they are given the right to appeal decisions made by the school. Each student is required to be given appropriate education and an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Another mandate of IDEA states that the student with disabilities must be educated in the Least Restricted Environment (LRE) (Martin et al., 1996). The topic of Special Education placements, classroom, and Least Restrictive Environment will be discussed more in depth later. Federal law states, “A child with a disability may be served in a separate environment only if the individualized instruction required by the child to make adequate academic progress cannot be provided in the regular classroom with appropriate special education services and supports” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997).

As of 2008-09 the number of children ages 3-21 that were receiving these services was 6.5 million. This number accounted for 13% of public school enrollment and about 38% of these students were classified as having specific learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The Special Education Classroom- Placements and Effects

It cannot be disputed that there are many students who have disabilities requiring different services than the general education public. The settings in which these children receive their education can range from specialized schools, which are fully separated from regular education students, to a full day included in the regular education room. Other placements include resource room for some subjects and instruction in the regular education classroom with a special education teacher for part of the day. Also students may be placed in a self-contained classroom, where they receive all of their instruction

for the four major academic subjects from the special education teacher. According to federal law, these students are required to be placed in the least restrictive environment, but this continues to be a debate over whether particular placements are too restrictive. There can be both benefits and negative effects of certain special education environments, and those effects have been the subject of many studies (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999).

Special Education has, at times, been hypothesized to have stigmatizing effects on children (Valas, 2001), but more recent research has not found enough significant evidence to support that hypothesis (Morgan et al., 2010). When a collaborative team decides the appropriate placement for a particular student, the possible academic effects are not the only ones taken into consideration. The student's possible social outcomes are also deliberated as well (Elbaum, 2002). The effect of the level of restrictiveness of the placement has also been a topic of several studies. Less restrictive environments allow for students to be more socially accepted and result in higher self-esteem (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Boardman, 2001). Self-concept of students with LD has been a concern of many parents and educators throughout the years (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2001). Academic achievement is important for all students, but positive self-concept is related to their social achievement (Vaughn & Hogan, 1990). Self-concept can also relate to academic self-concept (Elbaum, 2002). Research in past decades indicated that students with LD have lower self-concept in regards to academics as opposed to students without learning disabilities (Chapman, 1988). Other past research has delved further into the subject of LD and self-concept and related it to the classroom placement, but there were conflicting findings. Some showed that students with LD who were placed in the regular classroom

had higher self-concept than those who were placed in resource room or self-contained classrooms (Forman, 1988). While others found there to be no significant effect on self-concept in relation to classroom setting (Coleman, 1983).

Some researchers have sought to determine whether special education services that are offered are actually effective. One study (Morgan et. al, 2010) was conducted examining the effects of special education services on the students' learning and behavior. The children were kindergarten students from both private and public institutions. Data was collected in the fall and spring from the years 1998-2004. The results showed that delivery of special education services did not result in a significant difference in reading or math skills. On the other hand there was a significant positive effect on learning related behaviors, but no significant effect on externalizing or internalizing problem behaviors.

A meta-analysis (Elbaum, 2002) examining multiple research studies compared placements in order to determine whether there was significant effect on self-concept in students based upon the classroom in which they were placed. The 38 studies compared a total of 65 different placements. Students in regular classes were compared with students in the settings of resource room, self-contained classrooms, and special schools. Also, self-contained placement was compared with resource room and special school placement. When students with learning disabilities placed in less restrictive environments were compared with those in more restrictive placements, there were no significant differences of self-concept found, with one exception. One study showed that students with LD placed in a specialized school had higher self-concepts than those

placed in self-contained classrooms in a regular school. The placement or restrictiveness of the classroom did not have a significant effect on the students' self-concept.

The Classroom-Environment and Climate

Students' perception of their classroom climate can directly affect their achievement and behavior in school (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). There are several factors that influence students' perception of their classroom environment, one of them being teacher support. Teacher support is defined as "student perceptions that their teacher cares about them and will help them" (Tricket & Moos, 1973). If a student feels as though they are supported by their teacher, they will be more apt to ask for help and put more effort into their academics (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). A feeling of emotional support from the classroom teacher can increase motivation and other learning related processes that are academic in nature (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Another support in the classroom setting that affects students' perception of their climate is student support. This refers to them feeling cared about by their classmates, not only as an individual, but also in respect to their academic learning (Johnson et al., 1983).

The classroom should be an environment of mutual respect, which has been associated with cognitive engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). One study (Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2007) examined students' perception of different aspects of their classroom and its effect on engagement and achievement. The findings showed evidence that the classroom environment and support is related to student engagement. Students need emotional and academic support from both their peers and their teacher. There have been other findings that report that a positive classroom environment, including an

emotionally supportive teacher, is related to greater self-regulation in elementary and middle school students (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998).

Another aspect of the classroom environment that promotes academic success is classroom participation (Valiente et al., 2007). Students who have low engagement in the classroom will not get the most out of their learning experiences (Hughes & Kwok, 2006). Valiente (2008) examined the relationship between classroom participation and academic success and also relationships in the classroom. Their results supported the hypothesis that relationships in the class and engagement in classroom participation promote academic achievement.

Teacher-Student Relationship

The relationship between the teacher and the student could be the most important and influential one in the classroom. Past research has shown that students with positive student-teacher relationships achieve more academically (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Students who have a teacher that demonstrates warmth and acceptance will be more motivated to exhibit positive behavior, also (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). One study found students with warm and emotionally sensitive teachers yielded higher growth in math and reading (Pianta et al., 2008). Hughs, Luo, Kwok, and Lloyd (2008) conducted a study examining whether the relationship between the student and teacher, effortful engagement, and achievement were related. Effortful engagement relates to involvement in instructional activities, including trying and not giving up on learning tasks. It has been discovered in prior research that effortful engagement has a direct significant effect on achievement, with high levels of engagement resulting in improvement in academic performance (Greenwood, 1991). This study aimed to determine whether the teacher-

student relationship is also correlated to these factors. Children who were provided with a supportive teacher were expected to participate more in the classroom activities and exhibit positive behavior. As expected, the findings proved that effortful engagement in the classroom led to academic achievement. The results did not yield a significant correlation between the teacher-student relationship, engagement, and achievement. Attachment can be another aspect of the teacher-student relationship. Attachment is a deep and enduring bond that connects one person to another across time and space (Ainsworth, 1973). It is not just an important part of early childhood, but can play an important role in adolescence. Teachers of primary grades are more likely to form attachment relationships with their students due to the amount of time they spend with them. It is still possible for middle school and high school age students to form that bond, and the establishment of a close relationship is considered part of being a good teacher (Beishuizen et al., 2001).

Not all positive relationships are considered attachment. Teachers can have a very deep bond with their students without it being attachment. A secure student teacher relationship is “characterized by trust, feeling in tune with the student, and perceptions that the student feels safe with the teacher, the student would seek help, and the teacher could console the student” (Pianta & Nimetz, 1991). One study of middle school students examined motivation and grades and the relationship with the teacher. These sixth through eighth graders believed that their teacher cared about them and the results showed they paid more attention in class and received higher grades (Wentzel, 1997). African American youths were the focus of another study. They were well behaved and engaged in learning activities in the classes of teachers that had built positive

relationships with them, but were behavior problems in other classes of teachers with whom they did not have positive relationships (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). It is evident that positive teacher relationships lead to greater academic motivation and achievement (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Behavior problems are another issue in the school setting that can interfere with academics. Behavior problems are classified as either internalizing or externalizing (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978). Internalizing behaviors include depression, anxiety, and withdrawal. Externalizing behaviors are characterized by impulsive and aggressive problems. Behavioral issues in adolescence is a concern of many professionals due to the fact that those who display negative behaviors can be at risk for negative academic outcomes (Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003). There are many factors that can influence middle school students' behavior patterns. Their particular school's discipline policy, the school climate, and the academic focus can play a role in shaping the students' behaviors (Roeser, Eccles, & Sammeroff, 2000). One study (Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010) examined middle school students' perception of their school climate and its effect on behavior. It was determined that creating a positive school climate is influential on not only the decrease of problem behaviors, but also preventing them from occurring at all.

It has been mentioned in other studies that the relationship between teacher and child can be influential in their schooling. A positive teacher-student relationship may be a positive influence on behavioral outcomes, also. Students who view their teachers as caring and supportive are more likely to display fewer behavior problems and higher achievement (Loukas & Robinson, 2004). Hamre & Pianta (2001) discovered that a

positive relationship between kindergarten students and their teachers led to higher grades and test scores through fourth grade. These students also exhibited low disciplinary issues. As mentioned earlier a positive teacher-student relationship refers to warmth and trust and is marked with very little negativity (Pianta, 1999). Behavior problems, especially externalizing behaviors, can interfere with the relationship between teacher and student. These aggressive behaviors have been found to lead to a negative relationship with teachers (Murray & Murray, 2004).

One particular study (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008) sought to determine whether the relationship between teacher and student led to improvement in behavior or academic functioning. The results showed that significant externalizing behaviors are associated with poor adaptation in school. Warmth and a trusting teacher-student relationship were positively associated with school adaptation and the relationships characterized by conflict were negatively associated with school adaptation. The effect sizes were small, though, which means that the relationship is only one small aspect that affects school adaptation (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008).

The previous studies involving the importance of the teacher-student relationship have discussed primarily regular education students. Students with high-incidence disabilities have a higher risk of social problems. High incidence disability refers to learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, and mild mental retardation (Murray & Pianta, 2007). Those students are most in need of supports in the public school setting. One study (Murray & Greenberg, 2001) found that students with LD, ED, and MMR who had positive relationships with teachers had less delinquency. There are many factors that can promote positive relationships between teachers and students. The

organization of the school and classroom is one of those factors (Pianta et al., 2003). The relationship between teacher and student tends to decline when the students enter later grades and the school becomes larger and the environment more impersonal (Murray & Pianta, 2007). Changes in structure that increase teacher-student interaction are particularly important for students with disabilities. A classroom environment with a sense of trust, comfort, and familiarity can be beneficial to these students (Murray & Pianta, 2007).

Looping

There are many experts that are suggesting a type of restructuring in the classroom referred to as looping. Looping is defined as remaining with a core group of students and a single teacher over multiple years (Nichols, 2002). Looping usually lasts for two to three years. Several studies have proven that looping increases the teacher's influence on the students' educational development. Also research shows that the groups that were looping with a teacher had increased intimacy, stability, and persistence in the classroom (Rasmussen, 1998; Wynn & Walberg, 1994). The practice of changing teachers from year to year could make it difficult for the students to have a healthy and engaging relationship with the teacher. There are other countries that have been participating in this practice successfully. In several Asian countries the elementary teachers stay with their students for more than two years and the class stays the same also. The high school subject area teachers remain with the same students all four years, as well (Liu, 1997). A study conducted in Germany also yielded positive results. Zahorik & Horst (1994) examined multi-year grouping in elementary students. The benefits included the teachers' familiarity with the students' prior academic development and it

also removed the need for assessing prior knowledge each year, since the teacher was with them in previous years. Teachers who stay with their students over the course of several years become familiar with their students' learning styles, behavioral and social needs, and emotional issues (Hanson, 1995). These studies have also shown that students that participate in multi-year grouping, or looping, had higher academic achievement gains in comparison with those students who were not in a looping environment (Liu, 1997; Yang, 1997). Also the looping classroom promotes a sense of "family" or community between the teacher and students (Lui, 1997, Rassmussen, 1998).

The student-teacher relationship is not the only one that can benefit from the practice of looping. Teachers are also able to forge deeper relationships with the students' parents when they teach the same group of children for multiple years (Rassmussen, 1998). One study examined that concept, hypothesizing that the parents of students in a looping classroom would have a more positive attitude to their child's schooling as opposed to the parents of non-looping students. The findings supported this hypothesis, indicating that the parents of students involved in looping have a more positive attitude toward both the school and teacher and they also believed their children had higher levels of motivation toward their academics (Nichols, 2002).

The following study attempted to show that all of the positive aspects that enhance the classroom environment are perpetuated through the practice of looping in self-contained special education students. These students are in need of extra support, and the familiarity, warmth, and ability to develop a trusting relationship with their teacher will benefit them in the areas of academic achievement and behavior.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study involved the use of archival data collected from a middle school in Southern New Jersey. The students whose information was accessed were those who were looped in a self-contained SLD (Specific Learning Disability) Special Education classroom for two consecutive years with the same teacher. In this school there were 15 students whose data could be analyzed according to this criterion. The examiner, who works at this school, had access to this data through an online system, Webtrack, which holds electronic copies of the Individualized Education Plans for the district's Special Education students. Only the students' KTEA (Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition) scores from two consecutive years were examined from their IEPs. The names were kept confidential and when the examiner compiled the data, each individual was coded with a number.

The second type of data that was examined was behavioral infractions. Behaviors that were serious enough to receive a formal referral were considered major behavior infractions. Behaviors that were of less serious nature and were not formally written up were categorized as minor behavior infractions. The referrals were accessed through the data files at the school. Once again names were kept confidential and students were coded with a number.

Materials

Scores from the KTEA-II test that is administered annually were analyzed. This measure is used by all of the Special Education teachers in this district to measure yearly gains in the areas of Reading Comprehension, Spelling, Mathematics Computation, and

Mathematics Concepts and Applications. The raw scores for each subtest can provide age and grade equivalents, percentile ranks, normal curve equivalents, and stanines. The raw scores from Reading Comprehension and Math Concepts and Applications from year one and year two of the looping model were analyzed. The behavior infractions were analyzed and each student was placed in one of two categories- major or minor. This was also collected for both years.

Design

Each of the 15 students were coded with a number and placed in either group 1 or group 2 based on behaviors. Group 1 was the category of minor behaviors and group 2 was major behaviors. The Reading Comprehension and Math Concepts and Application raw scores for year 1 were inputted according to which behavior group the student belonged. The same was done for the scores from year 2. The measure that was used to analyze the data in this experiment was a 2x2 mixed ANOVA. The dependent variables were the subject areas from which the KTEA-II scores were extracted. The subject areas were Reading Comprehension and Math Concepts and Applications. The independent variables in the experiment were the behavior group to which the student belonged, 1 (minor) or 2 (major). The other independent variable was the year. The scores were analyzed from the first year the students were with the teacher in the self-contained classroom setting and from the second year with the same teacher. Students who were placed in the classroom after the school year began or were moved from the self-contained classroom at some point during the two years did not have their data analyzed. This design was used to analyze if the students made academic gains in Reading Comprehension or Math from year 1 to year 2, and also if behaviors changed after

looped. Finally, it was used to measure whether students who had minor behavior infractions made more academic gains than the students who were exhibiting more serious behaviors.

Chapter 4

Results

This study examined data taken from a sample of 15 students who were looped in a special education classroom for two years.

Hypothesis 1

It was expected that students would show significant achievement in the areas of Reading and Math and less major behavior infractions after being in a looping classroom model for two or more years. In the area of Reading Comprehension there was a main effect by year ($df = 10.164$) ($p = .007$).

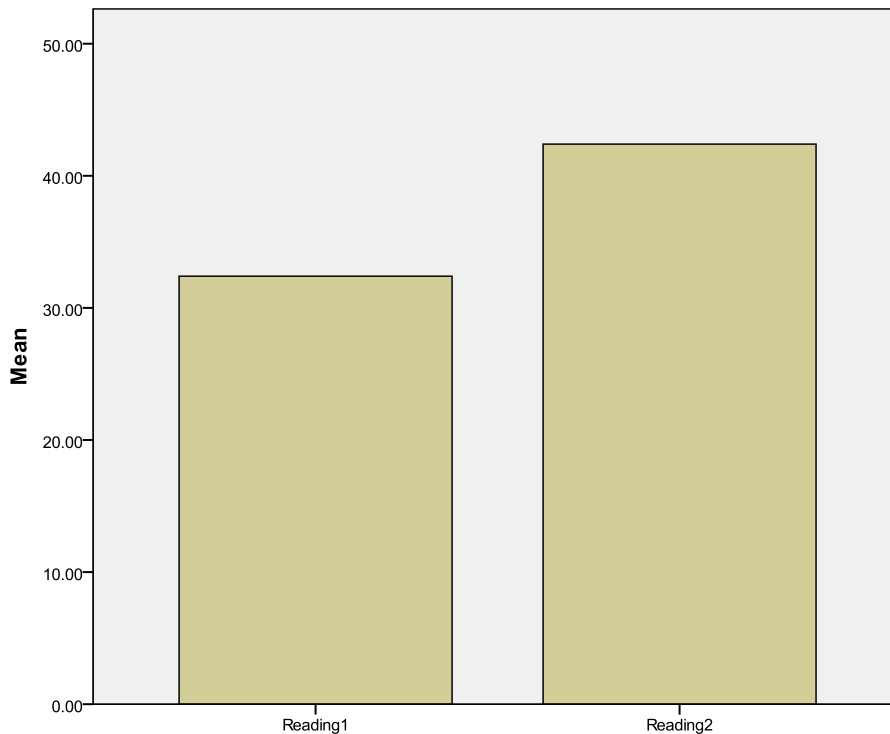


Figure 1

Graph 1 shows the mean raw scores taken from the KTEA-II in the area of Reading comprehension from year 1 and year 2. The mean raw score for year 1 was 32.4. The mean raw score for year 2 was 42.4

In the area of Math there was no main effect by year.

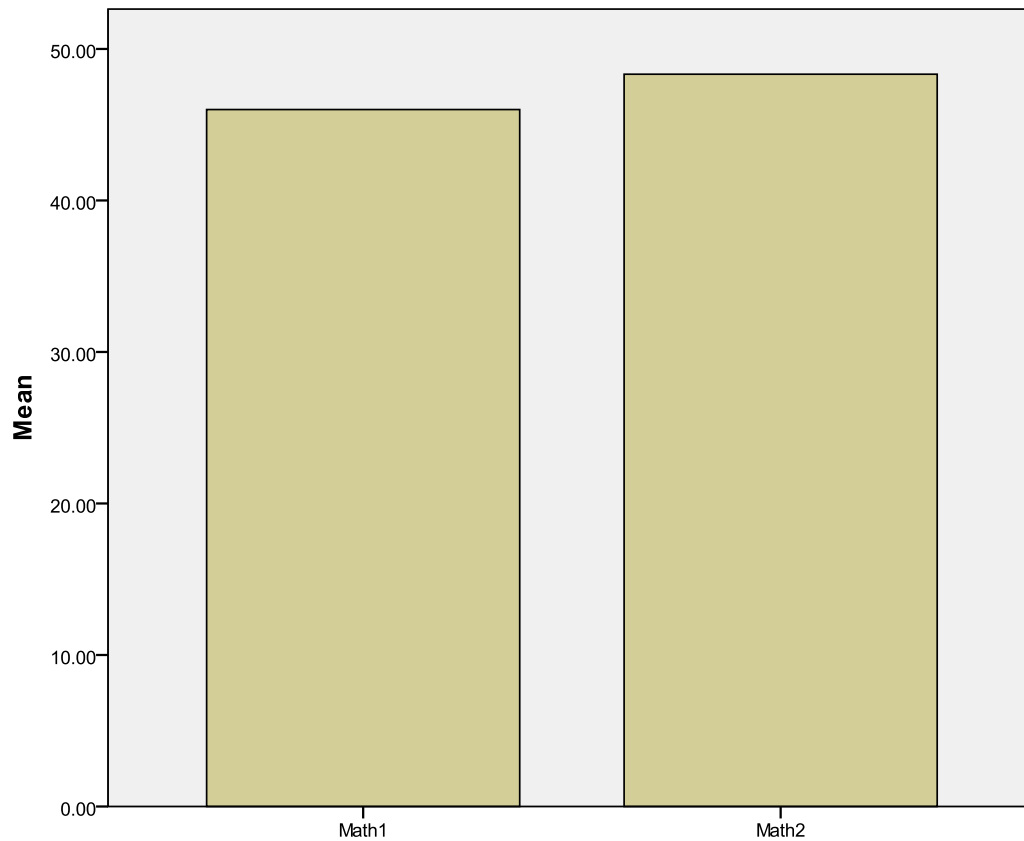


Figure 2

Graph 2 shows the mean raw scores taken from the KTEA-II in the area of Math Concepts and Applications from year 1 and year 2. The mean raw score for year 1 was 46.0. Mean raw score for year 2 was 48.33.

Each student was placed in behavior group 1 (minor infractions) or behavior group 2 (major infractions). It was expected that there would be a change in behaviors from year 1 to year 2 but each student remained in the same behavior group from year 1 to year 2, therefore there were no significant behavior changes after looping for two years.

Hypothesis 2

It was expected that students with that committed minor behavior infractions would show higher academic gains as opposed to those who committed major behavior infractions. In the area of Reading Comprehension there was no main effect for group and no interaction year by group. In the area of Math there was a main effect for group ($df=13.043, 1, 13$) ($p=.003$). Behavior group did not significantly affect Reading gains, but the students who made significant gains in Math were students who did not exhibit major behavioral issues.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The relationship between teacher and student can influence the child's schooling, in that a positive teacher-student relationship may be a positive effect on both academics and behavioral outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Looping, or multiple year work with the same group of students, results in students having a more positive attitude about learning (Nichols, 2002). This study attempted to show that the practice of looping is in fact, beneficial in the areas of academics and behavioral issues. Hypothesis 1 stated that significant academic achievements would occur among students who were looped in the same self-contained classroom for two years. The results were significant in the subject of Reading Comprehension. The students that participated in the looping model for the two full years with the same teacher did improve in the area of Reading Comprehension, as evidenced by the KTEA-II scores. However, the KTEA-II scores did not go up significantly in the area of Mathematics. In the area of behavior, it was hypothesized that they would change for the positive from year 1 to year 2 of the looping model. It was expected that the behavior group with the students who commit major behavior infractions (group 2) would be minimized by year 2. The results indicated that the groups remained exactly the same with group 1 (minor behaviors) having 9 students and group 2 (major behaviors) consisting of 6 students, and those students being the same from year 1 to year 2.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the students who made significant gains in Reading and Math would also be the students who exhibited only minor behavioral issues. This was

true for Math, but Reading showed no significance in academic gains in correlation with their behavior group.

It has been discovered that the students' perception of their climate can directly affect their behavior in the classroom (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). School climate is a product of the interactions that exist between students and teachers, and it can influence the perception of both the classroom and the whole school (Battisich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Factors in the classroom have a significant influence of students' perception of the school environment (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). In the present study only behavior referrals and teacher reports of behaviors were used to determine whether a student was in group 1 (minor) or group 2 (major). The students' perceptions of the climate of the school or their classroom were not investigated. Also, it needs to be taken into consideration that different teachers have alternate behavior management techniques and may be subjective when writing a behavior referral or classifying a particular behavior. Although the major behavior group did not get smaller from year 1 to year 2 it should be noted that not one student from the minor behavior group committed major behavior infractions the second year. The students remained in group 2 and their environment may have factored into the stability of their behaviors. Likewise the 6 students who remained in the category of major behavior infractions may have had a teacher who did not change their behavior management style, and therefore the behaviors did not change or improve. As mentioned above positive student-teacher relationships lead to positive behaviors in many cases. A positive student-teacher relationship refers to warmth, trust, and minimal negativity (Pianta, 1999). Aggressive behaviors have been found to lead to a negative relationship with teachers (Murray &

Murray, 2004). The teachers or students in this study were not interviewed so the nature of their relationship in the beginning of the looping model was unknown. Also, students were not interviewed or surveyed and the way they perceived the level of warmth they received from their teachers was unknown. It is possible that the students whose minor behaviors remained stable had a positive relationship with their teacher, and the students who remained in the second group had a negative relationship with their teacher, and the looping model perpetuated those relationships.

It was expected that students would make academic gains in both subjects that were examined, yet only Reading Comprehension showed significant gains. In this particular district, students who are classified as Specific Learning Disability and placed in a self-contained classroom are taught the regular education curriculum. The special education teacher is expected to differentiate their instruction and modify the lessons according to the students' needs, but they must teach the same curriculum model as the regular education teachers. This may have been a factor in the results of this study. The Language Arts curriculum is much more flexible and allows for more differentiation. The Math, on the other hand, is a series that is very regimented and involves pre-algebra and geometry skills that require higher order thinking ability. The students are able to use calculators during class and during the state testing. In the KTEA-II math section, however, students are not permitted to use calculators and must do all computation by hand. These basic skills such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, are not a part of the classroom Math curriculum, and that could explain the low scores on the KTEA-II. This has been a controversial issue between special education teachers and

administrators in this district, due to the fact that basic math principles are not being reinforced in the classroom, but they are tested in the KTEA-II measure.

Behavior group (minor and major) did not have a significant effect on academic achievement in the area of Reading Comprehension. In Math, however, the students who made gains were those who did not display major behavior infractions. There could be several explanations for these findings. Students who have been formally written up could be spending less time receiving classroom instruction, due to the fact that they may receive in school or out of school suspensions. It is the belief of this examiner that due to the intensity of the Math program being taught, it may be harder for these students to keep up with their studies. Also, the students in group 1 (minor behaviors) may be paying more attention during class, and that could account for that group's more significant gains. Finally, each teacher has a different instructional style and diverse strengths and weaknesses and that could also play a factor in the results of this study.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study. First and foremost was the sample size. This study could only use data from students in this school who were with the same teacher for two full years. In this particular school only 15 students fit that criterion. The district has not been practicing the looping model for very long, therefore there was not very much archival data to examine. Also, the data may have been more significant if the looping had lasted for the full three years as opposed to two, but due to scheduling problems in the school two years ago, the students had only been with the same teacher for two years.

Another limitation is the KTEA-II protocol. It has been used multiple years as a testing measuring and the students answer the same questions year to year. There are only two forms (A and B) and the students have been tested multiple times with both. Also it is not aligned with the curriculum, and it is just a general measure of Math and Reading skills. The method of testing was also a limitation. Students are tested by the special education teacher in the classroom, not privately. Students may be distracted or they could be having a bad day and results could be skewed. Finally, in regards to the KTEA-II, the proctors could be a limitation in this study also. All of the teachers have been trained to give and score this measure, yet errors in either could still be made.

Future Direction

The implications of these limitations strongly suggest that further studies should be conducted. This initiative should be continued in this district and more research and studies supporting looping should be investigated to encourage the continuation of it. Teachers who stay with their students over the course of several years become familiar with their students' learning styles, behavioral and social needs, and emotional issues (Hanson, 1995). Also the looping classroom promotes a sense of "family" or community between the teacher and students (Lui, 1997, Rassmussen, 1998). Although this study didn't yield significant results in all of the areas expected, the positive outcomes of developing a supportive relationship over a period of time with a teacher cannot be overlooked. Given prior research and findings, further studies over a longer period of time with a larger sample size would yield results that show that in self-contained special education classrooms looping has many more advantages than disadvantages and it should be continued.

If looping is a practice that is continued in this district and other schools around the nation, future longitudinal studies should be conducted. In a perfect looping model, students will be placed with teachers who share the same educational goals and are consistent in their delivery of academic instruction and also in their behavior management style. The climates in the classrooms should also be consistent, in that the teachers have a positive rapport with their students and create a classroom environment of academic rigor, mutual respect, and compassion for the students. If these variables are consistent, results will likely yield positive outcomes that encourage the continuation of looping in special education classrooms.

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