The tale of two classrooms: the looping experience

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The tale of two classrooms:
The looping experience

by

Jyll Johnson Miner

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education
Major Professor: Dr. Leslie Rebecca Bloom

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1998

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION 1
   Instructional Orientations 3
   Looping Practices 4
   Multi-Age Instruction 7
   Early Childhood Education 11
   Developmentally Appropriate Practice 14

Methods and Methodology 17
   Respondents and Site Selection 19
   Data Collection and Data Analysis 20
   Researcher's Role 23

Overview of Study 25

CHAPTER II. LIFE HISTORIES 27
   Rose McGlassen 30
   Pearl Robinson 39

CHAPTER III. TEACHER PLANNING 48
   Traditional Planning Approach 49
   Looping Planning Approach 54
      Integrated Thematic Curriculum 57
      Curriculum Webs 64
   Looping and Collaborative Planning 66
   Planning for Literacy and Looping: Rose's and Pearl's Experiences 70
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a clear need for research which is focused as directly as possible on the thought underlying teachers' day-to-day teaching, and for theory which is generated from such research. (Brown & McIntyre, 1993, p. 11)

This qualitative study takes a phenomenological approach to researching a specific educational practice called looping. Looping, a multi-year placement for teacher and students, is being implemented with increasing frequency in the United States. This research-based innovation offers promising alternatives to traditional graded educational practices if implementation is carefully and knowledgeably planned. Here, therefore, I offer an analysis of two carefully implemented and knowledgeably planned looping classrooms, specifically, the looping classrooms of Mrs. Rose McGlassen and Mrs. Pearl Robinson. The need for qualitative, theoretically based studies of classroom practices such as this is demonstrated by the confusion engendered by the myriad of educational approaches that have surfaced in the United States during the past century. However, looping as one of these many approaches has not been given much attention in educational research. Without such research teachers are unable to determine its overall value as a practice.

Of the limited studies available on looping, some have shown that looping facilitates Whole Language instruction (Hanson, 1995), developmentally appropriate practice, and student-centered teaching. Additionally, current studies (Daniel & Terry, 1995; Gaustad, 1992; Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996) suggest that the looping curriculum gives children the stability of having a consistent, significant adult involved with them over time. My study seeks to expand this body of knowledge and also to address how looping fits overall within
a framework of early childhood education, literacy, and multi-age instruction. Towards these ends, I describe looping practices in two elementary classrooms. One of the groups, taught by Mrs. Rose McGlassen, is in its second year of the loop, and the other, taught by Mrs. Pearl Robinson, is beginning its first year of a new cycle.

When I began this study, I used three guiding questions to help me focus the direction of my research. Guiding questions serve as "sensitizing concepts" which suggest to the researcher which concepts she will be particularly sensitive to in her observations and interviews; guiding questions are not meant, however, to determine an absolute or unchanging focus for the study. The three guiding questions I used were: 1) What are teachers' experiences in a looped classroom?; 2) What kinds of instructional approaches evolve in looping classrooms?; and 3) What is the personal and professional experience of teacher collaboration that emerges from looping practices? These questions were helpful throughout the research process and indeed, as this dissertation will demonstrate, I did learn extensively about Rose's and Pearl's experiences and instructional approaches in their looping classrooms and I did come to understand their collaboration as a part of looping. However, what my fieldwork ultimately taught me was that the most salient question to ask after gaining an understanding of looping and collaboration experiences was the following: How does looping enhance good teaching practices? As this dissertation will illustrate, through both descriptions of looping classroom activities and narratives about planning and teaching, looping is an innovative teaching and learning strategy that, at its best, enhances good teaching.
Instructional Orientations

In this section of the dissertation, I would like to discuss the four instructional orientations or learning theories that not only guided Rose's and Pearl's professional practices, but which are foundational to an understanding of this dissertation. That is, looping practices, multi-age instruction, Early childhood education and developmentally appropriate practice are theoretically grounded instructional orientations that, because they undergird Rose's and Pearl's daily professional practices, must be understood if we are to comprehend the narratives and descriptions that follow in Chapters III and IV. Further, understanding these instructional orientations as a grounding for this study is imperative to me because I take as foundational that Rose's and Pearl's beliefs and knowledge about what they do professionally shape their decisions (Goleman, 1995; Delso, 1993) as much as their past experiences shape their present classroom realities (Moallem, 1994).

For Rose and Pearl, looping is an early childhood educational approach that allows them to practice in a way that expresses their beliefs. As I worked with them, it became more and more evident to me how important it was to understand looping as a part of their belief systems. This assumption about the importance of beliefs, feelings, and knowledge prevents defining teacher decision making as discrete behaviors reproducible from one teacher and one classroom to the next and makes theorizing from practice a challenge. Further, recognizing that beliefs and feelings influence decision making places teachers' abilities to "transform and interpret knowledge, formulate intentions, and act upon that knowledge and those intentions, and act upon that knowledge and those intentions" (Moallem, 1994, p. 8) at the forefront of the research. Because teaching is also purposeful and "deliberate in the sense that teachers are able to
explain what they are doing and why" (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 121), this study focuses on two teachers, their beliefs and their practices.

Educators' beliefs about how and their instructional strategies influence educational practices. Their understandings of beliefs about the nature of learning allows them to select concepts and strategies consistent with those beliefs. Instructional orientations help teachers, such as Rose and Pearl in this study, to understand why they do the things they do or to explain why something happens. There are a number of instructional orientations that can assist teachers as they plan and create new instructional approaches, and this dissertation is grounded on several of them. They include: looping practices, multi-age instruction, early childhood education, and developmentally appropriate practice.

**Looping Practices**

It is difficult to provide an accurate history of looping, because there have been many varied efforts over the years, each with its own label, and because the extent or success of such efforts were rarely recorded. In the post-Sputnik climate of educational reform, labels such as "nongraded education," "open education," "individualized instruction," were often used more as expressions of intent than as indications of accomplishment. But all these terms refer to practices of keeping students and teachers together for an extended period, or grouping students by methods other than by age.

Much to my dismay, I found only a limited amount of information on multi-year instruction, or what I refer to as looping. However, support for the concepts can be obtained from Montessori and Waldorf schools. In each of these private school programs, one of the educational cornerstones is the practice of multi-year instruction of students. Early 20th century Austrian educator Rudolf
Steiner, founder of the Waldorf Schools, felt that teachers should follow a class throughout the elementary grades much as a "third parent" (Ogletree, 1974). Looping has also been successful in middle schools in Germany, where teams of six to eight teachers work with the same students from grades 5-10 (Koppich, 1988).

In the history of education in America, the one-room schoolhouse is recognized as the best example of multi-year teacher-pupil assignments. It was not until the Industrial Revolution that teachers and administrators in the United States began dividing children into groups of similar ages or grade levels (Miller, 1991). Unfortunately, this decision was based on the needs of the country and teachers, not the needs of children. It was meant to make the job of the teacher easier by allowing for whole-class instruction.

Barbara Pavan, who first surveyed the research literature on nongradedness more than 20 years ago, recently completed an update of that research with 64 added studies (Anderson and Pavan, 1993). Her findings suggested that, in terms of academic achievement and mental health, results favoring traditional single-grade groups are very rare. It appears that nongraded environments, like those created with looping, especially benefit boys, African-Americans, underachievers, and students from lower socioeconomic groups with increasing benefits the longer the children remain in that environment. Pavan's work also confirms the conclusion that nongradedness is most likely to be successful when teachers work in teams with multi-aged aggregations of children.

Research on looping has consistently suggested that long-term teacher/student relationships improve both student performance (George, 1987) and teacher job satisfaction (George & Oldaker, 1986). A look at the literature makes the scarcity of discussion and the rarity of implementation of multi-year
teacher/student relationships puzzling. Wood's 1990 article on students as citizens described multi-year teacher/student relationships as one means "to make sure that every child has the time to connect with the classroom, feel a part of all that goes on, and have the time it takes to succeed in school" (p. 34).

By contrast, the traditional single-year structure of classrooms has endured for almost 140 years without being described as an important reason for some of the current ills of the U.S. education system (Owen, 1987). The problems with our current age-graded organizational structure are based on the following three assumptions:

- Students of the same chronological age are ready to learn the same objectives.
- Students require the same amount of time, as in an academic year, to master predetermined content.
- Students can master pre-designed objectives for a grade level for all curricular areas at the same rate. (Stainback & Stainback, 1984)

As a result of these assumptions, pupils whose educational needs do not match this age-graded structure or who otherwise interfere with the flow of instruction are either excluded from school or placed into special classes, thus creating parallel but isolated systems (Stainback & Stainback, 1984).

Nontraditional practices that focus on student readiness instead of age, such as looping, are also increasingly vital to the countless children whose lives are full of change, whether the changes are of address, family structure, or financial status. Children today come from broken homes, go home to empty houses, or see parents only on weekends. In these situations, children's relationships with involved adults may be tenuous, making the stability of the
teacher-student relationship increasingly important. Research indicates that students benefit from having a teacher as a role model, mentor, and friend. Deborah Meier, an award-winning educator, considers the looping practice an essential component in her ideal school because it enables children and teachers to get to know one another well (Goldberg, 1991). Looping assignments, forms of multi-age assignments, appear to provide a strong support system for children.

**Multi-Age Instruction**

More information is available on multi-age instruction in general than on looping in particular. Because the practices are similar in many respects, I use some of the literature on multi-age instruction to highlight classroom practices that are prevalent in looping as well. Defined most basically, multiage grouping describes a classroom purposefully composed of children who are more than one year apart in age. Common terms associated with multi-age include mixed-age, heterogeneous, vertical, family, and ungraded or nongraded. The rationale for multi-age grouping is similar to that of looping, meeting students' individual needs.

But like looping, the intent of multi-age groupings in the 1990s is more than a convenience to accommodate increased or decreased enrollments of students to meet a desired class size ration. Stone (1995) reports, "The multiage classroom is becoming an increasingly popular way to restructure school." (p.102). States that have mandated or are considering mandates that involve multiage classrooms include Kentucky, Mississippi, Oregon, Alaska, California, Florida, Georgia, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. Components of this restructuring, such as team teaching and flexible groups, are described by Gutierrez and Slavin (1992) as typical attributes of multi-age programs. Stone describes the shift from traditional classrooms to multi-age as a shift from a focus
on the curriculum to a focus on children. This shift is manifested through the following practices in the multi-age classroom:

- process approach learning,
- teacher as facilitator of learning,
- an integrated curriculum,
- active hands-on learning based on children's interests and choices, and
- cross-age learning. (Stone, 1995)

Multi-age approaches to learning, then, focus on the whole child and his or her developmental needs instead of the expectation on that discrete skills should be demonstrated at a specific age by every child. A teacher provides open-ended activities and opportunities for learner participation. Multiage grouping, when thoughtfully planned, can allow children of various abilities and age levels to work and learn in an environment wherein they can be successful at their own developmental levels. Unlike the traditional classroom model in which each student has a set amount of time to "get it" or fail, looping classrooms and multi-age classrooms give students more time in a familiar learning climate and with familiar peers and teachers to develop, to grow, to get it—not unlike the one-room school of the past (Daniel and Terry, 1995).

The main purpose for using multi-age strategies is to provide opportunities for interaction and cooperation between and among children who vary in age, experience, ability, and maturity. Whatever the age grouping may be, the philosophy behind such multi-age groupings is to promote Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) to meet children's needs. DAP means providing curriculum and instruction that address the physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic needs of young learners and permits students to
progress through an integrated curriculum at their own rates and paces (Daniel & Terry, 1995).

In multi-age classrooms, which generally incorporate non-traditional instructional methods as well as non-traditional groupings of children, learning happens differently than in traditional settings. Children can help their classmates without fear of being accused of cheating; this is called peer tutoring. Students get excited about learning because they do purposeful activities that are frequently hands-on. The children in the classroom become active participants in their own learning and help to collect materials and documentations for the evaluation and assessment of their own work (Pavan, 1992).

In other words, multi-age classrooms replace competition with cooperation. Miller's (1991) qualitative study describes interdependence as the most striking quality in the multi-age classroom. He indicates that younger children approach older children for help and ages were mixed both in the classroom and at recess. The different expectations that children have of those older and younger than themselves lead to cooperation.

Katz (1988) reports that because cooperation and other prosocial behaviors are encouraged in multi-age classrooms, competitive pressures are minimized, and associated discipline problems are reduced. Collaboration through social interaction in multi-age groups positively affects all areas of children's learning (Stone, 1995). Gaustad's (1992) findings show that mixed age play groups were the norm in most cultures in history and still are in less industrialized societies. She observed that if given the opportunity, children will select playmates of a relatively wide range of ages. Children in same-age groups, according to Gaustad, were more aggressive than children in mixed aged groups.
Katz (1988) found that older children who had difficulty controlling their behavior had improved social skills after being asked to help younger children to obey. Hamilton and Rehwoldt (1958) report that in eleven of twelve comparisons, children in multi-age classes improved more in personal adjustment including self-reliance, sense of personal worth, feeling of belonging, and freedom from withdrawing. They also revealed the younger children in these classes were more secure and less withdrawn than students of similar ages in traditional single-grade classrooms.

Hunter (1992) composed a list of the critical attributes of multi-age programs. The teachers in the programs studied by Hunter identify long-range objectives, analyze tasks, and then proceed as rapidly as a student's validated learning allows. The instructional programs are based on a continuum that will lead to identified continuous progress goals. The teachers in Hunter's study are similar to Rose McGlassen and Pearl Robinson in that their goals are based on developmental views that transcend the current school year. Meeting such long-term goals requires careful planning.

In fact, Miller's (1991) review of qualitative research on multiage instruction identifies planning and organization as the most important factors in successful multiage instruction. Miller states, "Principal comments indicated that the most important factor to successful multiage instruction was the teacher's ability to plan and organize" (p. 74). Effective teachers do plan, and plans are followed to varying degrees in the classroom although planning may not be committed only to paper. Teachers in multi-age classrooms need special skills, training, and additional time for preparation and planning (Miller, 1991). Rose and Pearl have found this to be true in their looping elementary classrooms, a point I will extensively demonstrate in Chapter III.
Early Childhood Education

In a broad sense, early childhood refers to efforts to educate and care for young children in schools, centers, and homes (Feeny, Christianson, & Moravcik, 1991; Bowman, 1993). Typically, early childhood is variously regarded as the period from birth to children's entry into kindergarten. However, child development theorists and educators (Bowman, 1993; Bredekamp, 1987) have defined early childhood more broadly as encompassing the span from birth through age eight (Bowman, 1993). The mission of early childhood education is to open up a world to young children through experiences with people, events, animals, places, and things (Eliason & Jenkins, 1990). The need for diverse experiences is not limited to formal schooling.

Essentially, early childhood education has been seen as a facilitator of children's natural development and as preparation for later schooling (Lazerson, 1972). It has been similarly suggested by Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) that early childhood education can be seen as an environment for the natural and spontaneous development of the individual child (the maturation view); as a transmitter of the skills, knowledge, and values of the dominant culture (the cultural transmission view); or as a prescribed set of experiences intended to facilitate the progression of the child through developmental stages (cognitive-developmentalist view).

Additionally, other educators argue that early childhood education is needed because it has a lasting impact on adult life (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985). Since the 17th century, when modern views of early childhood education began to take root, educators have maintained that early childhood education helps children develop skills through a curriculum based on self-discovery, play, and interesting materials (Froebel, 1896; Pestalozzi, 1900). Further it has been
maintained that an early childhood curriculum supported children's skill development through allowing free choice and manipulation of materials (Hill, 1923), as will be shown in Rose's and Pearl's looping classrooms now.

During the 1960s, a transition to a more academic focus within early childhood curriculum surfaced (Jipson, 1991). Many early childhood programs began to place greater emphasis on accelerating the development of readiness skills and academic learning in preparation for public schools, displacing the focus on concepts such as play and self discovery. However, early childhood education has experienced a rediscovery in the past few decades. Currently, the most controversial debate in early child education is the use of a formal approach versus a holistic approach (Bowman, 1993; Elkind, 1987). That is, should early childhood education stress academic skills or define more developmental goals?

Presently, the prevailing view among early childhood educators is that educational goals and methods should reflect a developmental approach; this approach encourages each child to develop knowledge and skills at his or her own pace. The overwhelming argument is that the drill and practice approach is inappropriate to the stage of development of primary-aged children; it creates a "pressure cooker" environment that is contrary to the development of cognitive and social competence (Elkind, 1987). According to Vygotsky (1978), the early childhood learning process involves adults and children who "make meaning" together through interactions with one another. In this perspective, children internalize or reconstruct knowledge and skills as a consequence of social interaction with adults and/or older peers. This process involves on-going interaction of mutual social exchange between an intellectually and socially active child and older members of his or her community. Adults facilitate children's learning by helping them "make sense" of their acquiring knowledge
and skills from experience through social interaction, dialogue, and mutual adjustment with adults and older children (Rogoff, 1990).

The goals of early childhood learning, as eloquently described by Elkind (1987), include a "zeitgeist for learning", consolidation and adaptation of biological and psychological predispositions, establishment of appropriate and rewarding interpersonal relationships, and development of structure for thinking. In other words, early childhood learning is best fostered using informal and developmental methods that parallel and compliment children's natural ways of thinking and learning. Katz (1988) described appropriate learning for children as including spontaneous play, involving a variety of manipulatives and project work, in which children learn from their own efforts but with the guidance of the teacher.

In a study comparing children's performance in two reading strategies, one taking place at home and the other at school, Schickedanz (1990) found that home-based episodes were meaningful, child controlled, and socially collaborative, while the school-based instruction was adult-initiated and controlled, and children's performance was not consistent with their naturally developing patterns of learning. For example, the content of both reading episodes involved reading and writing words. Children in the home-based episodes were able to watch adults form letters of the alphabet into words with very explicit demonstration of phonemic segmentation, alphabet use, and letter-sound associations. In contrast, children in the school-based episodes were not provided with demonstrations; they were simply given words to copy. Therefore, Schickedanz (1990) concluded that a curriculum that stresses mastery of basic skills through drill, practice, and imitation alone threatens to cause the potential loss of meaning and self-confidence for children. The difference, then, between
the skills based, academically focused approach and an approach that places the emphasis on discovery, play, and self-directed learning rests in what is appropriate for children at varying levels of intellectual, physical, and emotional development. "Appropriateness" cannot be determined by age but must be determined by the readiness of the child to benefit from the activities in which they are engaged.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

The prevailing position of early childhood educators such as Rose and Pearl is to implement a more developmentally appropriate approach when educating young children rather than to use the drill and practice approach that solely stresses achievement of academic skills. Looping can enhance a developmentally appropriate approach because multi-year placements of students allow teachers to more effectively gauge children's individual development and needs over time.

Since the 1980s, the nation's educational system has been under intense public scrutiny. The public's interest in children and their education shows that they view the education of the "whole child" as being important and they place great value on the family's involvement in the entire educational process. The growing consensus since the 80s has been to reject the traditional approach to educating young children because students were found not to possess the kind of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills needed for the 21st century (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1992). As a result, much talk has surfaced on taking a more developmental approach to educating the "whole child" (Eliason & Jenkins, 1990).

In response to the concerns regarding young children and their education, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publicly reported its position on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in two
documents, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth to Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987) and *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children* (NAEYC, 1991). NAEYC states that "a high quality early childhood program should provide a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families" (1987, p.1). Further, the position statement prescribes that curriculum should be integrated so that learning occurs primarily through play, projects, and learning centers that are consistent with children's current interests and ideas. Teachers should guide children's involvement in projects and enrich learning experiences by extending children's ideas, responding to their questions, and challenging their minds (Bredekamp, 1987). Perhaps the most crucial point stated in the NAEYC's position statement is the notion that program quality is determined by the usage of child development knowledge. That is, teachers should apply what is known about how children learn in program practices (Bredekamp, 1987).

According to Weikart (1986, p. 9), developmentally appropriate practice means "approaching children where they are, not where we want them to be." Furthermore, Weikart (1986) suggests that in order to teach from a developmental perspective, teachers must understand the "real" basics; these are the developmental needs of each age group as well as the importance of meeting individual needs.

In a more refined sense, Bredekamp (1987) defines developmental appropriateness in two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. Age appropriateness refers to preparing an environment and planning experiences within the age span of children across all developmental
domains: social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. Individual appropriateness refers to planning and providing experiences that match each child's unique developing abilities, patterns, and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background across all developmental domains.

According to Piaget (1955), play enables children to developmentally progress from sensorimotor processing of infancy to preoperational thought in the preschool years to concrete operational thinking displayed by primary-age children. Thus, it is from child development theories such as Piaget's cognitive development theory that play is viewed as an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice. Typically, classrooms that implement developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) are described as those where children are given large blocks of time to play while moving freely in multiple work areas or learning centers interacting with materials and equipment with the help, guidance, and supervision of teachers (Bredekamp, 1987). Additionally, DAP classrooms provide relevant experiences that promote children's development of language, creativity, intellectual thinking, problem-solving, self-concepts, and physical and social skills.

Numerous early childhood educators (Bredekamp, 1987; Elkind, 1987; Katz, 1988) support developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs. They concur that children learn best through a play-oriented approach which fosters children's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development. Such advocates argue that the principles of a developmentally appropriate approach values children's ways of constructing knowledge through encounters with the world. That is, children's constructions are accepted and validated.
Educating young children is a serious task for teachers (Derman-Sparks, 1992). Early childhood teachers are responsible for facilitating children's naturally unfolding constructions of their environment (Piaget, 1955) through constant social exchange (Vygotsky, 1978). To enhance this process, teachers must provide a high quality early childhood program that offers a safe and nurturing environment and that promotes the physical, social emotional, and cognitive development of young children (Bredekamp, 1987). According to early childhood scholars (Bredekamp, 1987; Elkind, 1987), a major factor in this process of educating young children is teachers' knowledge of child development and its application in program practices; that is, the degree to which the program is developmentally appropriate. Roopnarine and Johnson (1993) suggest that teachers' knowledge, coupled with their beliefs, values, and interests, affect decisions relative to curriculum and teaching practices. Looping provides teachers a learning climate better equipped to acknowledge their beliefs, values, and interests.

Methods and Methodology

For this study, I use ethnographic methodology focusing on two classrooms and two teachers. Such qualitative research is described as field research, naturalistic, ethnographic, phenomenological case study, interpretive and descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Quantitative research seeks to take apart the subject and examine the individual parts. In contrast, qualitative research seeks to examine and understand how all the pieces work together as one, while still recognizing that there are multiple realities compared to singular ones (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The nature of qualitative inquiry is primarily inductive and observational as contrasted with quantitative inquiry, which is primarily deductive and experimental (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Because I view the practice of looping from the perspective of an elementary school teacher who has taught in a looping classroom, I was intrigued with the idea of conducting a study using qualitative methodology because it emphasizes the importance of context, setting, and particularly the study participants' frames of reference. In conducting a study of a classrooms, qualitative methodology seemed to me to be a particularly meaningful approach for, as Marshall and Rossman (1989) explain, it is particularly useful for holistic descriptive analysis. To study a classroom as a complex institutional setting requires both a holistic and "emic" approach.

The details I gathered in the classrooms while becoming an accepted member of these classrooms are presented as teacher narratives and ethnographic description. As I observed and interviewed, data were recorded in the form of field notes, "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 74). My field notes included descriptions of the instructional strategies, interviews with the teachers, informal conversations, descriptions of physical aspects of the classroom environment, and my personal reflections.

I would also note that my methods are informed by the tenets of ethnography. The goal of ethnography is to learn from people. Instead of collecting data from people, the ethnographer seeks to be taught by them (Spradley, 1979). As is typical in ethnography, teacher planning and instructional strategies in this study are explained in terms of the meanings teachers express in their interviews. Self-disclosure was encourage to the extent that it promoted reflection by the study participant. Questions sought meaning related to content coverage, utilization of instructional materials, and activity
structures. The primary sources of information were the interviews and classroom observations.

Respondents and Site Selection

To locate a respondent and classroom, I first began by sending out letters of inquiry to local districts to learn if they currently had looping classrooms. In my letter I stated that I was interested in looping classrooms and not multi-age classrooms. Rose's and Pearl's principal, Mr. George Dean, contacted me to set up a meeting with him to explain my dissertation proposal in further detail. Even though there were other classrooms in his school involved in looping, he suggested I select Rose and Pearl to work with because they had the most experience with looping classrooms. That meeting was followed by a phone conversation with the district curriculum director for approval. Finally, on August 21, 1997 I was able to meet with Rose and Pearl for the very first time. This meeting occurred during one of their contract work days, and I assisted both of them in their beginning of the year classroom set up routine. On August 27, 1997 I met with Rose, Pearl, and their principal to confirm that the teachers had agreed to participate in the study through signed informed consent.

The names of all teachers and students in this study have been changed to insure their confidentiality. This study takes place in an elementary school, North Brook Elementary, serving students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Students attending North Brook Elementary represent families of middle socio-economic status. The student population is predominately white as is the faculty of the school. The elementary school is ten years old. North Brook has a very strong, active, and supportive parent organization.

North Brook Elementary is in Lakeville, which is located six miles north of a major midwestern city and has a city population of 21,500. The town was
incorporated in 1903, and a wartime ordnance plant was built there in 1942. Later it was converted to a major manufacturing plant that is the city's major employer. Lakeville is the home of a state run community college and also a privately run Bible college.

Lakeville Community School District is the twelfth largest district in this midwestern state with 5,251 students. New construction and renovations are visible evidence of the community's support and pride of Lakeville's educational system. The district's educational program is anchored by the basics yet enriched at all levels. Special education and talented and gifted programs are well established. Music, art, and physical education are considered essential aspects at every educational level.

Revised and updated continuously, a seven-year cycle ensures that each curricular area is studied in depth. Standing committees of K-12 professional staff are charged with curriculum coordination and articulation. These efforts result in a well-rounded, organized program of study, emphasizing the mastery of basic skills. Typically, Lakeville students perform above grade level and rank at the top nationally on standardized achievement tests.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

I began data collection through semi-structured initial interviews in which I gathered life history information about Rose and Pearl's personal, preprofessional, and professional beliefs and development. I used a semi-structured interview format throughout this study because the technique, as described by Burgess (1984) "is a conversation with a purpose" (p. 107). Elliot Eisner (1991) says that the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive situations in which they work. Eisner identifies six features of qualitative research that will be components of this study: a field focus, self as an
instrument, interpretive character, use of expressive language, attention to particulars, and coherence, insight, and instrumental utility.

My descriptions here of Rose's and Pearl's teacher practices and classroom activities were developed through pre-observation and post-observation interviews over a six month period. The interview process served two primary purposes for this qualitative study. First, it provided me with first-hand stories of looping teachers' professional growth and development experiences, and second, it provided a means for exploring how looping teachers make sense of their experiences and their beliefs or hunches (Merriam, 1989; Seidman, 1991). The 23 semi-structured interviews, each averaging 60 minutes, also ensured that consistent information was acquired from both respondents, while at the same time providing opportunity for each of them to express ideas that might not have been elicited by specific questions (Borg & Gall, 1989).

To supplement the interviews and observations, I also include biographies of the study participants. Louden (1991) describes the importance of including a teacher's biography when studying teaching: "A full and vivid interpretation, I believe, requires attending to the meaning participants bring forward to events, and sufficiently extensive fieldwork to follow developments over time" (p. xi). Goodson (1992) also used biography to begin his study of teachers' practice not in their classrooms, or as he calls it, "the point of greatest anxiety" but at a less vulnerable point. The less vulnerable point is teachers' work in the context of their lives. He found in his own research that teachers' flow of dialogue around their life stories offered rich data sources.

Life experiences and backgrounds are obviously key ingredients of the people we are, of our sense of self. To that the degree we invest our
'self' in our teaching, experience and background therefore shape our practice. (p. 115)

Bullough (1989) believes researchers' lack of interest in teachers' life experience, in which teachers actions are embedded, in addition to a study of their teaching, has led to an incomplete understanding of teaching. He advocates an understanding of both through the study of teachers' life experiences coupled with collection of classroom data.

For this study, Rose and Pearl's biographic interviews set the historical context for the data on looping classroom planning and practices collected from over thirty classroom observations and twenty-three interviews throughout the 1997-98 school year. The respondents willingly told stories about their personal and professional growth and development and appeared to be comfortable talking with me. In general, the respondents seemed straight-forward and uninhibited about sharing personal experiences.

Immediately following each of the interviews, I spent time reflecting on what the teachers said by making descriptive notes about particularly insightful comments (Creswell, 1994). I later referred to them during data analysis and writing phases of this project. I treated data analysis and data collection as an iterative process. I also made additional notes during transcription to remind myself of possible implicit assumptions or points for further consideration during other interviews. Following the first three interviews, I read transcripts and began a process of "decontextualizing" (Tesch, 1990, p. 7). This was accomplished by reading the transcripts and thinking about reoccurring themes. I continued to refine and reduce categories to create themes across observations of classroom practice and interviews. I assigned code words and colors to each theme and
systematically coded every interview transcript according to designated themes (Creswell, 1994). Initially I coded 18 themes.

During the next step of my study I "re-contextualized" the data by organizing the information on cards into a meaningful story (Tesch, 1990, p. 97). I sorted and resorted the cards within the deck many times. This same type of reorganizing data and analyzing patterns continued throughout the entire writing process. As more stories were told, subtleties and assumptions emerged within the themes. During the process, I read the information on the cards many times. On several occasions I re-read an entire transcript of an interview attempting to develop more insight into meaning of a particular quotation. Also, I used my journal notes to combine my data with my experience and theoretical investigation (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

**Researcher's Role**

During the time I conducted this research, I was an elementary teacher in the same midwestern state as my participants on a professional sabbatical leave. I have "first-hand" knowledge of how elementary schools and looping classrooms in particular work. This knowledge and experience helped me to understand the complexity of the elementary school, describe the experiences of others, and conduct semi-structured interviews designed to elicit insight and thinking from the teachers I interviewed and observed. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) and more recently, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) indicate, having prior understanding and insight is an advantage and a disadvantage to the qualitative researcher.

On the positive side, because this story is about a topic that I have lived, I was very interested in finding out more about what others who are in the same role have to say about the topic of looping in the elementary school. This interest
helped to sustain my energy in designing the study, carrying out the observations and interviews, and analyzing the data (Seidman, 1991).

On the other hand, because I was so familiar with the issues surrounding this research project, I had to take specific steps to ensure the "trustworthiness" of the data collection (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 148). I did this in several ways. First, prior to collecting the data, I wrote a detailed overview of how the project was developing and my feelings, intuition, and some implicit assumptions I had about the research topic. Second, throughout the data collection and data analysis stages of this project, I kept a journal of my own thoughts as a way to monitor my interests and bias with the intent of minimizing any distortion of data (Peshkin, 1988). Third, although a common assumption of any qualitative research project is that the researcher's interpretation of the findings is implicit (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987), I continually reviewed the audio-tapes and field notes in an attempt to separate my own perspectives on the topic from what the respondents said were important to them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The notion of trustworthiness in data brings up the issue of validity for the study as a whole. Validity is defined as "the degree to which results reflect a clear, representative picture of a given situation" (Dobbert, 1982, p. 259). In order to assure validity in this research study, the data collected from the various observations, formal interviews, and informal interviews were analyzed throughout each phase of the study. Harry Wolcott (1990) rejects the concept of validity in qualitative research and suggests that what we really seek is "understanding." Yet, Wolcott suggests that validity may be the major strength of qualitative research. Wolcott (1991) proposes the following points to "satisfy the implicit challenge of validity":

- Talk little, listen a lot.
To establish credibility with my study participants and also in this study, I took a number of precautions. First, I extended my observation of the classrooms from three months to a more prolonged engagement of six months in order to view the development of these classrooms and to report more fully on the learning environment and activities. The additional time also allowed me to check for accuracy. After each interview and observation, participants were given opportunities to review these field notes and provide feedback. Thorough review of the literature allowed me to provide theory to support my view of the participants' practice. Member checks were conducted by verifying and/or adding to the data interpretations by conducting follow-up interviews and observations. In addition, the process of triangulation used in this study also entailed the analysis of data collected from two sources, interviews and observations. I believe my thick description (Geertz, 1973) will allow other researchers to understand looping, thus allowing them to make their own decisions about its value, what qualitative researchers call transferability.

Overview of Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter II tells the life histories of both respondents. These biographical stories are presented to connect the past
with the present, illustrating how teaching is uniquely personal. Chapter III offers narrative data and analysis of how Rose and Pearl plan individually and collaboratively. Two key elements that emerge in this chapter are developmentally appropriate practice and teacher collaboration. By collaboratively planning, they are able to integrate their social studies and science curriculums. However, they choose to plan their literacy blocks individually in order to better meet the developmental needs of their students. Chapter IV describes actual classroom practices and daily life in these primary looping classrooms. The data for this chapter derives from observing in the classrooms, attending staff development workshops with the participants, and interviewing the participants about classroom practices, from August to February during the 1997-1998 school year. Chapter V concludes with my final thoughts and reflections on how the practice of looping enhances good teaching practices. Recommendations for future implementation are also provided.
CHAPTER II. LIFE HISTORIES

In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is. (Goodson, 1992, p. 4)

Teaching is a complex activity that can be uniquely personal and intuitive. It requires us to focus on its qualitative nature if we are to increase our understanding of it. Research that focuses on the personal and recognizes the importance of teachers' life experiences in the process of teaching while at the same time chronicling the classroom actions of the teacher, provides a broad base from which to draw conclusions about the practice of teaching (Schulz, 1997).

Teachers' thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and experiences are all aspects of teachers' cultures which we need to know about and be aware of as a key factor in education, especially in times of change. Yet this critical aspect of education is often undervalued and under researched. Educational investigations have paid little attention to teachers' voices. I believe that teachers are the key to educational change and school improvement. Louden (1991) advocates learning more about teachers' perceptions.

The teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement. Teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop it, define it, and reinterpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe, and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. (p. vi)

We need to know how teachers themselves see their situation, what their experience is like, and what they believe and think. Louden (1991) worked alongside a classroom teacher in an effort to understand how teachers' knowledge changes over time. He noted how teachers' personal reflection in personal history
and story is aimed at achieving a deeper, clearer understanding of the teaching situation. The role of narrative is clear in his comment:

Because our teaching was such a stream of unreflective experience I've needed to replay these stories in order to make meaning of the experiences we shared. These stories may not be very technical but they were stories which needed to be told if the experience were to contribute to our development as teachers. (p. 172)

In this view, the act of narrating one's experience as a teacher focuses reflection on key life events and helps the teller of the story to make sense of what has happened.

A life story is the personal reconstruction of the experience of the teacher, the story told of his/her professional life. A life history, like that which will be shared in this chapter, draws on wider range of evidence: interview discussions, relevant texts and contexts. In this shift from simple narrative to interpretation the life story is located in a broad contextual background which is built up through the joint activity of the teacher and the researcher. This collaboration facilitates a shift from the life stories to the life histories (Goodson, 1992).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994), writing about the study of narrative and storytelling as a way of coming to know about teachers and teaching, tell us that "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives. Britton (1982) also suggests that "our memories of past experiences are in story form, are narratives. We so readily construct stories out of our past experiences that it is difficult to perceive that anything has been 'constructed' at all" (p. 153). Telling stories is an activity that orders meaning, and in this way, narrative discourse contributes to knowing. Narrative researchers, on the other hand, describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 416).
The structure of the stories we tell, their narrative line, gives form to our ideas and meanings. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explain that:

the narratives of all of us are complex and contain various threads that knit a kind of continuity and unity in our professional lives, they are particular orderings of prior experience, brought to bear on new situations. As such these orderings yield new ways of telling a story of who we are and how it is that we are doing what we are doing. (p. 153)

This is true for teachers because the collection of classroom data and biographical underpinnings—those personal, historical, and professional experiences that influence routines, patterns, and habits of teachers—is a relatively new method in the study of teaching. Biographical stories are collected as explanatory material, recovered as various narrative are traced, so that teachers' stories can be told with new meaning.

The importance of teachers' biographies is heavily underlined by the growing realization that teachers' classroom practice is partially shaped by their own school experience, as students. Teachers may teach as they themselves were taught. A teacher's professional socialization begins when the teacher is a child through many years of watching teachers at work (Goodson, 1992, p. 13), and this becomes a major element in the teacher's mental schema of teaching, which includes the influential image of self as a teacher. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988) "Teachers often tell stories about their experiences as learners. They learn a great deal through reflecting, through their stories, on their experiences as children. They learn about teaching through reflecting on their experiences as learners" (p. 188).

These authors contend that the stories "function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community
This chapter is a telling of Rose's and Pearl's historical and life stories. It is but one telling, and only a partial one at that, for as Margaret Atwood (1985) writes:

> It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances. (p. 126)

Nevertheless, Rose's and Pearl's stories represent an opportunity for others to see what I saw through observing their classroom practice and recording their lived and told stories.

**Rose McGlassen**

Rose McGlassen is tall and slender with an athletic build that indicates her passion for physical activities. Her hazel eyes are intent and serious, her smile and manner warm and engaging. In her twentieth year of teaching in Lakeville during the time of this study, Rose hopes that her students will remember her as a teacher who made a difference.

Rose McGlassen was born, raised, and has always lived in the Midwest region of the United States. Rose has been married for twenty-eight years to Tom McGlassen and has two daughters. The older is now a twenty-five year old engineer living in California; the younger recently graduated from the same state university as Rose, majoring in secondary education and completing her student teaching in Colorado. With her husband, Rose enjoys biking, hiking and golfing. For the past 14 years, together they have participated in a cross state bike ride that lasts for a week. She has hiked down into the Grand Canyon Half Dome Mountain in California. Rose is also an avid reader, which she believes is typical of most good teachers. Rose states in our first interview:
I like to think I took a different path from most people. I didn't really know I wanted to be a teacher until after my daughter was born. I wanted to take all the education classes I could for my child. Then after taking several classes, I decided this is what I wanted to do. I really liked it.

Growing up Rose remembers school as a good place to be. She always attended Catholic schools with her older brother. Her favorite teacher was the nun she had for first and second grade, when her classroom was looped.

I loved that woman. She was caring and mothering, which is rather ironic because she was a nun. I also remember in sixth and seventh grades I was in a K-8 Catholic school. My friends and I would always stay after school and help the teacher, talk to the teacher, hang out with the teacher. We loved to do that. I'm sure she was saying, "Time to go home now." We wanted to hang out and talk. I remember school as a being a very caring, kind, and comfortable place. I would like to think it is like that in my classroom today. I want my students to feel safe and comfortable. I want them to be kind to each other. School should be a place to go to feel comfort.

Despite the fact the Rose had a fondness for school, she did not consider herself to be an academically focused student in high school. In fact, she hadn't thought about attending college until after she had graduated from high school.

I didn't usually do my homework. In fact, I probably didn't know there was homework assigned. My real goal in life was to get married and have children. That's kind of the way I was raised. I don't know if that was the way I was raised, but that's what I thought. When I graduated from high school, my father told me that I needed to get a job. Surprise!
So that is when I first thought about going to college. Well, you know it's a little late after you graduate from high school to just start thinking about liking to go to college. My brother was going to South East Private College in my hometown, and I thought that is where I'd like to go, but I didn't have the money.

Her memory is typical of many of the women interviewed by Kathleen Weiler (1988) in her book *Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class and Power*. In interviews these women do not identify specific incidents or statements from their parents or teachers, but recognize the subtle messages they were given. Weiler (1988) writes that it is difficult to separate our present subjectivity from the historical forces that helped shape that subjectivity.

Before her marriage, Rose went to work in a local furniture factory, where she was assigned to a special department that made panels. The work was very physical and the noise levels loud. It was then that Rose decided to take night classes in order to pursue a different occupation.

We had to stretch the fabric over these small panels. It sounds easy, but my fingers were all blistered from where the nails would stick out and stick me in the hands. It really hurt. The thing that bothered me the most about the job was the noise. It was so loud. I also couldn't stand the smell, so I started taking night courses to learn secretarial skills. In high school I had taken a lot of clerical classes. I decided that I wanted to get out of that factory. Then I decided that after getting some secretarial training, it was also time for me to move away.

While watching television one Saturday morning Rose saw an advertisement about a major cereal company in the northern region of the country. This
commercial was like a little program showing off the company headquarters. Laughing, Rose remembers being very impressionable.

It showed this beautiful place, and I sent a letter off to the headquarters in Northern Big City and told them that I was interested in working for them. I sent a resume and everything. Believe it or not, they hired me! I went up there on the train, had an interview, and they offered me the job. I then found a place to live and took the train back to my hometown that night. I didn't know a soul, but I didn't even care. It was going to be an adventure! When I got home, I still remember my father saying, "Haven't we been good to you?" I lived there about a year and worked for this company and really liked it a lot.

During this time Tom McGlassen, Rose's future husband and high school sweetheart was stationed with the U.S. Army in Turkey. They were married when Rose was 20 years old, and Tom was 21 years old. They started their married life in Virginia where Tom was stationed. Then he got orders to go to Alaska. When that occurred, Rose returned home and lived with her parents for seven months and worked for a major manufacturer of agricultural machinery. It was this experience that led Rose away from the idea of ever entering the business world, but not away from the dream of attending college.

After working there I knew I never wanted to go into business. When I had worked at the major cereal company, it had been such a different atmosphere. There had been a lot of men and women. In this job I worked with time study people who were very concerned about pleasing the boss. I had never seen that before. It was a total shock for me. In high school I hadn't taken the business class path. What I saw I knew I didn't want to be part of. When I started taking college classes, Tom, my
husband, encouraged me to take business classes because there were a lot of jobs in business. It just wasn't interesting to me at all. I laugh now at how naive I was then.

After Tom finished his military service, they moved to a college town in the northeastern part of this midwestern state. Tom was able to graduate with a business degree in three years, and Rose finally began her pursuit of a college degree.

Being in the college environment and knowing I wanted to go never left my mind. We knew that he would go first, and then eventually I would go. He went through undergraduate in three years, and we lived in married student housing seven years, no I think it was six years. Before he graduated, I had started taking night classes when we could afford it. Before he started working, I took a full load that summer. After he graduated, I had to take a full load so that we could remain living in married student housing.

While taking classes Rose read that a three-year span between children was good. She had her youngest daughter when she was a junior and 25 years old. Thinking life was pretty much set, Tom and Rose purchased their first home in this college town, and Rose signed up to do her student teaching there. Then one day Tom came home with things from his office packed up in boxes and announced he had quit his job. Rose was stunned. He was unhappy with the recent sale of his company and the way things were being handled. As a result, they ended up moving to Lakeville. One of Weiler's (1988) respondents shared a similar experience with Rose—the expectation that wives should defer to their husbands. After all, he had a career mapped out, so the respondent had to transfer colleges and change majors to fit into his plans. Rose adjusted her plans
by quickly finishing classes during the summer and requesting that her student teaching placement be reassigned to Lakeville:

He had been to Lakeville once in his life and thought this was a good place to live. You might say that the first part of our life wasn't exactly planned out very well. He didn't even have a job here. He just started sending resumes out in the areas. I finished up classes that summer and had to get my student teaching reassigned. I was reassigned to Lakeville.

It was during her student teaching experience that Rose met and became friends with Pearl Robinson, who was already teaching. Rose graduated in December and spent the spring months substitute teaching in Lakeville and surrounding school districts. Every time she substituted in a school in Lakeville, Rose would make a point of talking to the principal and expressing her interest in teaching there. Rose was not encouraged that her desire to teach in Lakeville would be fulfilled:

All the while I was student teaching and all the while I was subbing, I would see Mr. Smith, and I would say that I was very interested in a job in Lakeville. He would just laugh! Whatever principal I would sub for, I would tell him and he would laugh too and say that Lakeville did not hire teachers without experience. I kept reminding them though. Then Pearl Robinson had her first son Mark, and I did her long term subbing in first grade. I went in and watched how she taught. Well, it just so happens that a teacher who was teaching with Pearl quit in the summer. She told me while I was subbing for Pearl that she was going to. Once again, I went in to tell the principal that I was very interested in the first grade job that was going to be open. He told me that he would phone me to set up an
interview. As you can imagine, I sat by the phone. He called me and told me that I could come in for an interview. I went, and he just asked me point blank if I wanted the job. I said "Yes, of course!" And it was mine. I didn't even interview or anything.

Rose says that for the first time in her life she really wanted something. She felt she had worked hard and would make an excellent teacher. Teaching in Lakeville just seemed to make sense because that was where they were living and also where her daughters would go to school.

I would have done anything for that job! I would have stood on my head and taught at the same time. I wanted a teaching position so bad. By then I hadn't gone by the wayside like I had the rest of my life when it was like la-de-da. No, this was what I wanted out of my life, I wanted to teach!

Rose's determination to teach bears out what Carothers (1995) writes about choosing to teach.

Teaching is hard work. Choose teaching because you want to teach. Teach because you believe that the human spirit is capable of learning at any age and strongly desire to be part of the dynamic interactions that characterize positive learning—total engagement of the minds, body, spirit in an inquiry about those things that are known as well as those that seem distant and impossible. (p. 27)

Rose feels that when she first entered the teaching profession, she was idealistic. Perhaps that is why she chose her pseudonym to be Rose McGlassen, thinking of the rosy glasses she chooses to wear.

When I first started teaching, I was so excited to have a job and having it be in Lakeville. Every day I was so idealistic! I thought I was going to
save the world! Save every child, and over the years I've realized that it was nice to have that idealism, but you can't impact a child more than his or her family does. The family may not have the same values that you have. At the time when I first graduated, I thought everyone had the same values I had. School was such a comfort to me; I would recommend school to everyone. I now realize that not everyone had the same feelings about school and books and teachers that I did. I've wanted my own children to do their best possible, but I've learned that not every parent wants their child to be a doctor or a rocket scientist. Maybe their goal is for their children to get married and have children. Maybe the goal is to graduate from high school. I do think that all parents want their children to be successful, but in different ways.

Rose's disclosures about the dissonance between her preferences and those of others illustrates that possibly the most treacherous aspect of teaching occurs "when teachers face themselves" (Jersild, 1964). Rose seems to have accepted that not all students and parents view education as she does, and that takes insight. Critical to truly seeing and understanding the children we teach is the courage to reflect about ourselves. Facing our biases openly, recognizing the limits imposed by our embeddedness in our own culture and experience, acknowledging the values and beliefs we cherish, and accepting the influence of emotions on our actions are extraordinary challenges.

Ten years after receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree, Rose decided to pursue a Master of Arts degree from a private university in Capital City. Before starting the graduate program, she had taken courses totaling over twenty hours. Her master's degree is in reading.
I decided to get my master's degree when I knew for sure that I was going to stay in the education field, and teaching was going to be my career. I wanted to know everything I could, which is funny because I still don't know all I could know. Of course, my husband was supportive because it meant I would move up on the pay scale. Really though, Tom was very supportive. I couldn't have done it without him. The girls were in elementary school. He was always supportive even back when I was working on my undergraduate degree.

Rose found completing her master's degree while simultaneously raising a family and teaching full time was not that difficult. It was similar to how she completed her undergraduate degree.

What I did was very simple for me. In the summer I went and took my classes, came home and played and spent time with my girls, and then I studied late at night. I was used to that because that is how I got my undergraduate. If I had to read a book or chapter for a class, that's what I read my girls. It wasn't that hard. Sure, there were times when I was stressed, but stress is part of life.

One of the best instructors Rose had was a professor during her master's program at the private university in Capital City. Reflecting back on the impact that person had on her, Rose thinks out loud.

This person asked questions throughout the whole class, so when I was driving home for thirty minutes, those questions stayed with me. Do I need to teach that? Why am I teaching that? Why do I do that? Is that the best way? It was good timing in my life because I could relate it all to my classroom. Those are questions I still ask myself every now and then.
Rose has now taught twenty years in Lakeville. Lakeville is the only school district where she has taught. However, North Brook Elementary School is the second building in Lakeville where she has taught. All of her teaching experience has been in first grade except for two years when she taught fourth grade, and this current school year she is teaching second grade.

Pearl Robinson

Pearl Robinson's shiny, short black hair and warm blue eyes are dramatic features of this petite, soft-spoken woman. She grew up in the Midwestern region of the United States in the same small town where her father also grew up. Her hometown is about 50 miles west of Lakeville, where Pearl teaches and resides with her family. Family is very important to Pearl, and it is the primary reason she choose to enter the teaching profession. In our first interview she indicated that she wanted to be available for her family like her mother, who was a teacher, had always been.

My mother was a teacher, and I just thought that I liked the idea that my mother was always home when we were home. She worked when we were at school, and then she was home with us. I knew I wanted a family, and I always liked the idea of being a teacher. I thought that would be perfect. I guess I never thought of being anything else except a teacher. I knew when I started college that was what I wanted to do, and I never doubted it.

Such beliefs were deeply embedded in her life history. As with many female teachers, mothering, although a complex and deeply contradictory relationship with children (Casey, 1990), is a central part of Pearl's life and worldview.

One early, influential feminist analysis of schooling was Rosemary Deem's Women and Schooling (1978). One of the strengths of Deem's analysis is her
emphasis on the continuity of women's work as mothers in the family and as teachers in the primary schools. Thus, Deem argues that there is a continuum between the rearing and socialization of children within the family, where the primary work is done by mothers, and the socialization that takes place in the early years of schooling with the work done mostly by women teachers. All teachers once were young children engaged consciously or unconsciously in observing and constructing knowledge of teaching both at home and at school (Britzman, 1986). Having a mother who was a teacher, Pearl observed teaching both at school and at home.

However, there were times in her life when Pearl did not like the idea of her mother being a teacher in the same K-12 building where she went to school. Reflecting on some early memories she shares such times.

A school memory I have is my mother was a teacher in the same building where I went to school. I can remember that she was a third grade teacher, and I'd go down to her room and say, "Mom, I need lunch money," and her kids would say, "Mrs. Johnson, your sister is here!" Of course, she loved it, but I thought it was disgusting. I can also remember when I was in eighth grade, I got in trouble for chewing gum when I wasn't supposed to. The teacher went and told my mother instead of taking charge of the situation himself. We had a basketball game that night, and she came and literally took me off the court and made me go down to his room and apologize. I was mortified that my mother would do something like that. Then I had a few words of wisdom from my mother, and she let me go back to the gym.
Thinking back on her early years, Pearl remembers getting in trouble a lot due to the strictness of her teachers. One incident in particular even had her worry for her safety.

I got tied in my seat with my headscarf by the teacher. I remember worrying about if something would happen, and I wouldn't be able to get out of my seat, like a fire or something! I remember vividly that on one occasion I had a shoe with a strap that had broken, and I could not get down to try to fix it.

When asked as to the reason she was tied in her seat, Pearl laughs and replies:

I was probably up and around all over the room. No different than some of the children in here and children I have had in past years. But this was one technique this teacher used. She tied students in their seats. We soon learned not to wear headscarfs. She wasn't a very nice teacher, she also made students sit in a little storage space. Her room was right off the gymnasium, and there was this little door under the bleachers, and it was dark in there and very scary. She'd make kids go in there and sit in the dark for punishment. Not good, not good at all.

One favorite teacher stands out in Pearl's memories. This teacher was especially nice and got Pearl's attention by reading a very interesting book in which the characters go to the local county fair.

My favorite teacher was my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Dau. She read us Charlotte's Web. I loved that book and her as a teacher. She made that book come alive, and all of us really liked her. She was definitely one of the better teachers I had. She was a very caring person. I had a rather bad teacher the year before, and we did not get along. Mrs. Dau didn't seem to know about that, or she didn't care to know about it. She
really liked kids, and as a student you get an idea about teachers. Some really like kids. When my class graduated from high school as seniors, we dedicated our annual to Mrs. Dau. She was our favorite teacher. Nothing stands out in my mind as outstanding as far as teaching, but I remember her kindness.

Currently Pearl’s two sons are both sophomores. One is sixteen-years-old and attends high school in Lakeville. Her eldest son is twenty-years-old and a sophomore in college at a major state university in the eastern part of the state. She and her husband, Joe Robinson, have been married for twenty-three years. Fondly, Pearl shares:

I married someone from my hometown. My father knew his parents and grandparents, so we have known each other for a long time. I grew up with two brothers, one older and one younger.

Pearl shares about the closeness her family felt during the years she grew up on a farm with her parents and two brothers.

We did a lot together, my brothers and I. On Sunday afternoons we would play football or basketball and stuff like that. A lot of times we would end up having a lot of other kids come to our place too. They would ride their bikes over after church on Sunday. We would laugh and laugh because we’d do silly things and say silly things.

Living on a farm in the Midwest also meant that Pearl was active in the local 4-H Club. 4-H is an agriculturally focused student group in which many rural children participate.

I was in 4-H as a child, and that was a big thing in my life. The county fair was always a highlight of the year for us. Of course, I had to do projects like cooking, sewing, and home furnishings. I always thought
that was rather a drag because I was such a tomboy. I didn't really like being in the house and doing the house projects. As long as you were in girls' 4-H, you could show livestock in boys' 4-H, but it was considered boys' 4-H. I showed cattle.

Ironically, when asked about current hobbies she enjoys, Pearl told about the pride she takes in trying to keep her home clean and organized.

This isn't really a hobby, but I take pride in my home. I try to keep it clean and organized. Very neat so that everything is where it should be. I don't really enjoy doing it, but I enjoy the end project seeing that everything is neat and orderly for my family.

This sense of keeping everything neat and tidy carries over to her classroom, where despite having a great deal of hands-on activities and materials, Pearl finds a place for everything. Pearl also enjoys playing golf and reading. Gardening is also a favorite pastime as long as it is simple in nature, like a flower garden.

During the time of this study Pearl was in her twenty-fourth year of teaching the primary grades, twenty-three years of which have been in Lakeville. Her first teaching position had been in the southern part of the United States in a major city's inner city school. Reflecting on that early experience, Pearl states:

I started teaching in 1973. I was right out of college, I mean really right out of college! I graduated in August and started teaching the same month. My first year of teaching was in an inner city school where I had no supplies, no materials, nothing.

When asked why she had decided to pursue employment outside of her midwestern state, she offers:
At the University I was in the Cooperative Urban Teacher Education Program, and they had brought people in from all over the country that had inner cities. A friend's sister from home had done it. Back then we had to have an area of concentration. It wasn't an endorsement; it wasn't a major. I was really interested in the program because it seemed like a world away from me. I chose what I think they called disadvantaged children as my area of concentration. It sounded so interesting, like I could make a difference.

Pearl came home for the summer after her first year of teaching. It was during that summer that she became engaged to her husband, so she did not return to the South. She remembers applying in many districts around Lakeville. In fact, after signing her contract in Lakeville, she was contacted by State Capital City and asked if she would consider breaking her contract in Lakeville in order to come teach for them.

A friend of mine talked to the Director of Elementary Education in State Capital City, and that person said he would be very interested in me because of my prior experience and the program I had gone through. It just so happens, that he called me and asked me if I would consider breaking my contract in Lakeville. I had just signed my contract when State Capital City called. I told them that I couldn't break a contract. That just wouldn't be me.

Pearl still remembers seeing the supply closet at her school in Lakeville for the first time. She remembers the puzzled look on her principal's face when she asked if it was for the teachers to use. Her teaching experience in the South had been so different.
There were so many differences, I don't know where to start. We had a library there but could not use it. Nobody was allowed to check out books because they got taken. So we never went. No reference materials or anything. My children had no books, no supplies. I bought them crayons and scissors. My room was real different. First of all, there were no halls, so if you went out of my room, you were outside. One whole side of my room was made out of panels, like how my room connects to Rose's. However, if I opened the panels I was outside. None of them locked. So my room was virtually open all the time. It's terrible to think that anyone could have come in there if they wanted to. The school yard was surrounded by a big, tall fence. I did have a lot of things taken. I'd come back from the weekend, and things would be gone. I remember I bought the children new supplies for Christmas, and when we came back, it was all gone, everything. Some of the kids had taken their scissors home over the break because they knew what was going to happen to them.

Other things that year seemed very strange to Pearl. She remembers never having to do a lunch count or ticket or even a report card. Her entire school qualified for free lunches.

If it rained, the kids did not come to school, but the cafeteria would be full at noon. All the kids were sent to the school to get a good lunch, and then they would go home again. They didn't stay once they were there if it was raining. They had some hard rains down there. Nobody thought that was the least bit odd. There was no art, music, or physical education classes. I taught them all, and there was just no way to do it all. I had to supply all the materials. I couldn't keep a tape recorder or a record player in my
room for music because it would be stolen. Anything I would have stored would have been gone if I didn't use it that day. I had my eyes opened.

Her parents did not agree with her decision to go to the southern part of the United States to teach in the inner city. After all, due to the fact that Pearl had attended summer school, she was able to graduate from the university in three years. They did not like the idea of their young and only daughter taking on such a task. Pearl thinks it was a major life step for her in terms of growing up, and for the first time in her life she was making her own decisions.

It was very good for me to get away. My parents couldn't go because my mother's teaching year had already begun. I think we started later than the schools up here. I suppose my dad could have taken me, but I think he was thinking if we don't take her, she won't go. They did not want me to go. But it was good for me. I went and had to make my own decisions. I picked out where I was going to live on my own, I set up my room on my own, everything.

During her first year of teaching outside her home state, Pearl taught first grade. Until last year, Pearl had experience teaching only first grade. Last year was the first year she had looped a class from first to second grade. She considered it another growth experience for her.

When Mr. Olson, our former principal, allowed me to loop first, I think it had to do with the fact the I had never taught another grade other than first, and Rose had. We were both comfortable with that decision. I think he was shocked when we initially talked to him about looping. At our stage of life, change isn't always easy to do, but we had both evolved to that point. We knew that this would be good for kids, and we thought it might also be good for us getting recharged.
Rose and Pearl consider themselves on learning journeys. They perceive their teaching as opportunities to promote learning in children and in themselves. They appear to hold these views because of their combined forty-four years of teaching experience, rather than in spite of them. I state it in those terms because previous studies suggest that the practice of teaching narrows and hardens some teachers' thinking and spirit (Lortie, 1975; Yee, 1990). It wears down their enthusiasm, their creativity, and their dedication. According to these studies, it reduces some teachers into functionaries who deliver the curriculum to students, but who do not invest their work with personal conviction. In contrast, Rose and Pearl's years of teaching appear to have broadened their outlook on education and on life. Sue Middleton (1993) summarizes: "Teachers, as well as their students, should analyze the relationship between their individual biographies, historical events, and the constraints imposed on their personal choices by broader power relations, such as those of class, race, and gender" (p. 19). In awakening to history in studies of teachers' stories, Goodson (1992) believes that life history work is a most valuable avenue for collaborative, intercontextual work. Teachers' stories are part of teachers' lives, and the study of their stories helps us to understand the relationship between their lived experiences and their craft knowledge.
CHAPTER III. TEACHER PLANNING

Planning is a fact of life in the professional work of teaching and a curricular mainstay in teacher preparation. Freiberg and Driscoll (1992) suggest that planning accomplishes many important goals. It makes learning purposeful, facilitates good management and instruction, provides for sequencing and pacing, provides for a variety of instructional activities, and establishes a repertoire of instructional strategies. Teacher planning is a significant area because in it teachers make a wide variety of decisions that ultimately affect students (Clark and Peterson, 1986). A concept of curriculum planning to which both Rose and Pearl adhere emphasizes the central role of teachers. According to Schwab (1983):

Curriculum is what is successfully conveyed to differing degrees to different students, by committed teachers using appropriate materials and actions, of legitimated bodies of knowledge, skill, taste, and propensity to act and react, which are chosen for instruction after serious reflection and communal decision by representatives of those involved in the teaching of a specified group of students who are known to the decision makers. (p. 240)

Information regarding teachers' instructional planning in general and traditionally will be presented first in this chapter. I will also discuss information on planning for looping classrooms. That information will be followed by narrative data and analysis of how Rose and Pearl plan collaboratively for their integrated thematic social studies and science curriculums. The chapter concludes with narrative data and analysis of how Rose and Pearl plan individually for their literacy blocks in their looping classrooms. As I will discuss further, I focus on literacy because this is of paramount importance to both Rose and Pearl, as primary looping teachers.
All teachers face challenges when planning instruction, whether it be in a single-year traditional classroom setting or in a two-year looping classroom. Some key factors affecting those challenges include students, curriculum materials, guides, school schedule and physical facilities (Brophy, 1982; Brown, 1988). With regard to students, teachers seem to be influenced the most by varying student abilities (Borko and Niles, 1987).

A number of organizational factors have also demonstrated profound influence on all teachers' planning regardless of pedagogical approach. These include the goals of the school administration, the principals' planning requirements, administration policies regarding materials, class size, and grouping, and team membership (McCutcheon, 1980). In addition, teacher characteristics have been linked to affecting teacher planning practices. Among these are teachers' own interests, subject matter specialty, beliefs about planning, and professional experiences (Russo, 1982). However, there are significant differences between planning for a traditional single year classroom versus planning for a looping classroom, which I will discuss below.

Traditional Planning Approach

The traditional approach to curriculum, which continues to dominate most schools today, assumes that students come to school with the same experiences, progress at the same rate, and learn in the same way. Tyler's (1950) rationalistic, objectives-first planning model is one example that dominates curriculum making today in the United States (May, 1986; McCutcheon, 1980). McCutcheon (1980) believes the four step model remains influential because it appears sequential, sensible, and based on industrial production logic that fits well with a current national climate of accountability for the country's schools. Tyler's (1950) model consists of: (1) specifying behavioral objectives, (2) choosing appropriate
learning activities, (3) organizing and sequencing the chosen activities, and (4) selecting evaluation procedures. Like Rose and Pearl, I too began teaching with this model of traditional planning.

The curriculum changes of the 1960s and 1970s suggested that teachers plan small, isolated behavioral objectives that state what children should be able to do; encourage activities designed around those specific behaviors; and separate testing of students' achievement of the objectives. This view of curriculum supported commonly held beliefs regarding the efficient education of large numbers of children (Oakes & Lipton, 1990). The desire to efficiently cover the material during a time of expansion of knowledge in most disciplines led teachers to plan curriculum that emphasized basic skills and facts. Consequently, a traditional curriculum consists of decontextualized repetition of concepts, which offers no integration of skills. In traditional planning, teachers rely heavily on curriculum manuals for planning.

Textbooks also greatly influenced the scope and sequence of traditional teacher planning as shown in McCutcheon's 1980 study. Teachers were concerned about the inadequacies of textbooks, but they relied upon them as their major source of planning. They made changes in the teachers' guides by considering whether students needed to learn the concepts and facts presented in the texts or if they already knew them, if teachers believed their questions were better than those in the guides, or if teachers could relate what students already knew to their daily lives and to the textbook content.

Rose and Pearl both share early teaching memories of when they both used more traditional approaches to planning and teaching in single-year classrooms. Rose remembers her teaching and planning being quite different over the twenty years she has taught in Lakeville.
When I first started teaching here we had a programmed reading program that also included ability grouping in programmed reading. It was a totally phonetic approach. The words were all controlled vocabulary. Totally controlled! Then after that we adopted a major series, which I really liked. Now I would never go back to either of them. The major series offered some phonics, sight words, pretty good stories, and the skills were cycled so you knew exactly what skills to teach and when. The teacher's manual told you when. Now we base decisions on students, not just because they are in second grade and in the fourth month of school. Since I taught first and fourth grades I found out that we had some of the basic skills taught over and over again like main idea, sequencing, things like that. Then we switched about three years ago to this literature-based approach.

Rose's reference to programmed reading is an example of the decontextualized skills prevalent in traditional curriculum. When she talks about switching three years ago, she is referring to moving from a traditional skills-based approach to her current child-centered approach.

Recalling her experiences with traditional planning, Pearl describes when she used to plan for boardwork for the students to complete individually at their desks. This was the model that was prevalent. She explained that this popular approach took most of her planning time and most of the students' morning learning time.

We used to do boardwork. We had something written on every inch of the blackboard, and all the students had to copy it down. In the morning we would give them a packet of worksheets; the first one was usually their boardwork sheet. That's what they were expected to work on when I was
working with one of the three ability reading groups. Of course, they had a spelling sheet, a handwriting sheet, and a fun sheet like a puzzle or something. That was what took care of the majority of our morning. Oh, my goodness! It was a real crisis if we were going to be absent. Who would get the boardwork up for the day? It took such a long time to write out on the board, but minimal time planning really. Most of the other parts of the day consisted of lecture time or quiet work time at their desks. There wasn't a lot of hands-on activities, and I certainly didn't do centers. They had to sit in their seats and, of course, by afternoon they had the wiggles. There have been big changes for the better, I think.

Pearl now recognizes that children in first and second grades need many opportunities for hands-on learning. They learn through their senses, through concrete experiences, and by active participation with manipulatives, not by being confined to a desk working on a packet as traditional pedagogy dictates.

Traditional planning, such as Rose and Pearl used to do, makes teachers feel constrained. According to Sardo Brown (1990) teachers in traditional classrooms feel constrained in each of the yearly, term, unit, weekly, and daily planning levels because they are held accountable to "decisions made by someone else in the school system" (p. 63). These teachers struggle with teaching mandated content because they also want to teach lessons they feel are relevant and want to be able to adjust the instructional pace to meet students' needs, abilities, and interests. Traditional planning relegates teachers to being curriculum implementors, rather than developers (Sardo Brown, 1990). Traditional planning also results in a sense of isolation. According to McCutcheon (1980) the lack of opportunities or need for teachers to interact with one another while planning for traditional pedagogy limited their discussions on
issues and ideas. That became an issue, particularly when teachers felt unfamiliar with a subject area or a new curriculum. Rather than admit they had inadequate knowledge of a subject or admitting weaknesses, they fell back on their teacher manuals for fear of being judged by their peers. As a result, teachers were more likely to remain isolated and only plan activities they felt comfortable with, disregarding unfamiliar activities.

Moreover, the traditional classroom sometimes tends to be a territory staked out by the individual teacher, and its boundary is not to be violated lightly. A teacher's whole day may be spent in just one room. One elementary teacher put it this way:

I live in my own little world in my classroom. Sometimes I think that my children and I share a secret life that is off limits to anyone else. We just go about our business, like so many peas in a pod. (Lieberman & Miller, 1984, p. 6)

When planning and pedagogy follow a traditional style, schools and school schedules are simply not organized to facilitate interaction among teachers. There is little or no time allocated for teachers to get together, and the schedule is often so tight and complicated that even if there were some time, few teachers would have the luxury of having it at the same time or day or place. Teachers are typically divided from each other by grade level and subject area differences. They rarely set foot in each other's schools or visit their colleagues' classrooms. All of these factors combine to separate teachers from each other. "The very act of teaching is invisible to one's peers" (Lieberman & Miller, 1984, p. 9).

Like Rose and Pearl, I began teaching with this traditional model of planning in a single year classroom. I was handed the third grade curriculum guides and manuals the day I was hired. The planning and implementation of
the objectives was entirely up to me. As a teacher with nine years of experience, I still find planning complex and personal, and like Rose and Pearl, find traditional planning and pedagogy constraining and isolating.

But now teachers are more often being empowered to use their planning to make important decisions not only about what young children will learn, but also how they will go about the learning process and how the learning will be evaluated. Rose and Pearl think the practice of looping has empowered them as teachers to enact their beliefs in ways traditional practices did not.

Looping Planning Approach

Today, innovative teachers like Rose and Pearl are implementing non-traditional learning classrooms and climates, and therefore plan differently from the traditional model described above. They must make decisions about how to teach, what to teach, when to teach it, and how to best assess that learning has taken place. In order for decisions in these four areas to be developmentally appropriate and more child-centered, they agree with Spodek's model that planning should take into account the following:

- child developmental knowledge
- individual characteristics of children
- teachers' knowledge base of various disciplines
- values of cultures
- parents' desire
- knowledge children need to function competently in our society. (Spodek, 1988)

Routman (1991) also says moving to more meaning-based and student-centered approaches is growing steadily.
That these principles are central to Rose and Pearl’s planning processes is evident during their planning sessions and in their interviews. In one of the early team planning sessions in which I observed Rose and Pearl collaborating, Pearl explains to me the idea of meeting students where they are, not having a one-size fits all curriculum.

Anytime you do a new strategy or approach, you customize it to the needs of your students at the time and also with your own teaching style. If you are not comfortable with it and are not able to get it across to your students, there is no point. Both the students’ and the teachers’ needs must to be considered.

When planning either collaboratively or individually, Rose and Pearl make the materials meaningful and find ways for their students to make connections between real-life situations and learning. They believe that students learn best when they have responsibility, choices, and control over how learning takes place. Both of these teachers understand the importance of seeing each of their students as individuals with individual needs, interests, and abilities. Thus, while planning they relate subjects, as much as they can, through themes and linked experiences. They listen to the learning going on around them.

Paying attention to the ways plans for learning are enacted suggests Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) idea that "curriculum is something experienced in situations" (p. 6). They maintain that these experiences take place "through processes of interaction with things, things we call curriculum materials" (p. 137). Teachers play an essential role in these processes of interaction as they are the ones responsible for designing the manner in which students then interact with curriculum materials. After all, curriculum materials are the tools of the trade of teaching.
Grant, Johnson, and Richardson (1996) suggest that teachers thinking about looping familiarize themselves with the curriculum for all grade levels they foresee teaching. These authors say that a looped curriculum will probably be a hybrid of a single-grade, single-year curriculum and a mixed-age, continuous progress curriculum. The teacher will want to meet the curriculum requirements of each grade level, but will be provided with the flexibility to extend learning over the two-year period for students who may need a little extra time and work on some content areas.

(p. 27)

The two-year time frame has significant consequences for curriculum planning, particularly for planning for individual student needs. As Pearl explains, looping gives her "the advantage of time" when it comes to planning for long-term goals:

Knowing that I will have them all next year helps me plan long-term goals, and gives me the advantage of time. Even though I know I have all next year to continue, as a looping teacher you push and plan hard. At the beginning of the looping cycle it is sometimes hard, because you are trying to get to know your students as fast as you can. The second year is such a pleasure.

Pearl's narrative illustrates that the looping cycle encourages her to plan carefully, pushing herself to make both years a success for students. Further, planning the curriculum for looping focuses on making the best decisions for meeting students' needs. This is best accomplished when teachers know their students well.

Looping teachers tend to know more about their students' learning because the classroom focus is on each child as an individual rather than all children as a
group, therefore more opportunities are available in planning to tailor the curriculum to individual student needs (Checkley, 1995). Wood (1990) describes multi-year teacher/student relationships as one means "to make sure that every child has the time to connect with the classroom, feel a part of all that goes on, and have the time it takes to succeed in school" (p. 34). Rose gives one example of how her looping classroom allowed one of her students to "open up".

The students know me. Some of my students were very quiet last year, for example Paul Crane, who last year didn't say a word, has blossomed so much this year. He feels comfortable. I would have never have had the opportunity to see that if I had him for only one year. His timeline for comfort took a little longer.

Planning for students such as Paul, a student who flourished in a looping classroom, is integral to Rose's and Pearl's conception of what good planning should be. But planning is not only about the students; it is also about the content of the curriculum teachers plan for their students.

Integrated Thematic Curriculum

Integrating the curriculum and teaching through a thematic approach requires planning and vision; Rose and Pearl have both. Jacobs (1989) contends that integrated curriculum describes a unit of instruction based on a theme approached from two or more traditional disciplines. Planning units and themes to address important concepts throughout the year involves teachers and students in the decision-making process. A significant aspect of integrated learning is that teachers and students are able to explore ideas in many different ways. Those alternative avenues generally do not come preplanned and prepackaged, but are constructed by the students' thinking patterns and
interests. Rose and Pearl know connections are unique and varied among any group of learners.

The integrated approach reflects a child-centered view of primary education, advocating the use of themes. Thematic teaching is, according to Routman (1991) "planning and teaching centered around a theme, topic, concept, or literature selection which is meaningful, real, and relevant to the children." (p. 27). A thematic unit may include but is not required to include, all subject areas within the curriculum. It may also include extension areas, challenging activities, field trips for enrichment, and learning centers. Routman (1991) also says that:

- a thematic unit is an integrated unit only when the topic or theme is meaningful, relevant to the curriculum, and students' lives, consistent with Whole Language principles, and authentic in the interrelationship of the language processes. (p. 278).

Bredekamp (1992) says that "meaningful, real, relevant" topics and activities may be determined by the age level of the children being taught, the region in which they live, the background experiences of the children, and the relevance of the topic to the children's lives. For example, in Arkansas, farming is the primary occupation, yet many children have not been exposed to or had the opportunity to study various types of farming within the state.

Organizing the curriculum around a theme can dissolve the barriers between subject areas and allow children to work together in various flexible groups. In developing thematic units, teachers need to include practices that are developmentally appropriate for their students. For Rose and Pearl, themes arise from two sources: the ongoing curriculum and children's interests and needs. Often themes develop from a combination of the two, the result of ideas generated
during classroom activities. Themes are learner-centered because children have input into the path that learning will follow. Because looping classrooms keep students and teachers together for an extended period, the group can share themes longer as they continue to build onto them from shared experiences. The teacher and students will be able to connect experiences from the first year with the second year. Rose speaks of such a connected experience.

Recently when we were planning for our regions of the United States theme unit for projects time, the idea of teaching the students about the regions through studying state parks came up. Last year when we studied about the United States, we looked at major cities and coasts and climates and things like that. It was a great unit because students were able to bring in information and pictures from family vacations and things like that. But, even last year I had wanted to introduce the idea of state parks to the students because I have such personal interest in it. We kind of shelved the idea, so when we looked at it again this year, Pearl was like, "Okay, let's go for it." This gave my students a natural connection to build upon and it gave Pearl's students an interesting angle of learning about the United States for the first time. Next year, we'll return to what we did last year because it was good.

Pearl gives another example of how teachers are able to make connections with their students from year to year.

Last year we organized a great thematic unit on careers. We involved parents and everything. So this year, we decided to build upon that theme by studying famous people, most of who were from the United States. The students had the choice to decide who he/she would learn about. This created a wonderful biography unit, and because we had
emphasized careers last year, it was evident that during their research students were interested in finding out what jobs these famous people had in their lifetimes. When the students shared their biography projects that included facts and timelines, the whole class benefited from learning from each other.

Through effective student-centered planning, looping teachers such as Rose and Pearl help children carry over information and build on these connections. The two year curriculum becomes woven together through integrated thematic instruction.

Integrated thematic instruction becomes a collaborative process whereby the voices of teachers and students are heard. Identifying and deciding on themes to pursue during the instructional year, or years as in the looping case, is an important step towards a meaningful, integrated thematic curriculum approach to thinking and learning. Through thematic units and integrated learning, students "grow holistically without artificially compartmentalizing learning" (Rand, 1994, p. 178).

An integrated thematic approach to planning enables learners to gather knowledge holistically rather than in compartmentalized pieces. It shifts planning from executing a traditional prescribed plan (as outlined in a teacher's guide) to formulating for a specific group of children in a specific classroom at a specific point of time. The integrated thematic approach reflects a child-centered view of primary education, advocating the use of themes or topics as organizing elements for planning and instruction. Drawing on integrative models (Katz and Chard, 1989) and related curricular concepts (Taba, 1962), integrated instruction incorporates four key ideas into instruction: a) a topic-centered approach to early learning, featuring interesting investigation for young children to explore; b) the
organization of instruction around knowledge to be gained, processes to be learned and dispositions to be developed; (c) ample small-group and shared activity; and (d) repeated opportunities to experience important ideas firsthand, individually, and with others.

When more emphasis is placed on the development of thinking abilities, the way curriculum is planned and presented is changed from one with an emphasis on teaching isolated knowledge and skills to one of helping students apply knowledge and focus in depth on a few problems and issues. There is also an emphasis on tasks that have meaning for the students so that learning becomes more internally motivated (Sizer, 1984). Therefore, while planning, teachers should focus on complex, meaningful problems that include associated tasks global enough for students to grasp their purposes, and in which instruction of basic skills is embedded.

Beginning stages in planning for Rose and Pearl include discovering and selecting themes to be implemented in the classroom, determining criteria for appropriateness of themes, and restructuring the instructional day to accommodate larger projects and activities inherent in integrated thematic units. Rose reflects on how they became interested in learning more about integrated thematic curriculum and making more time for projects.

We've taken several classes on integrated learning and watched the Lillian Katz videos on using the project approach. The videos were recommended to us by a state education consultant. Then we went to the downtown school where they utilize a projects-based approach. We were hooked! We saw the enthusiasm on the part of the kids and also the teachers. This was about the same time we knew we wanted to plan together because we would both be looping. It seemed to make sense. We
wanted to plan our social studies and science together. Previously we had tied social studies and science with our themes from literacy block. For example, if the literacy theme was Food, then the theme for science and social studies was Food. It was across curricular areas. That worked well, but it wouldn't fit our looping needs. Pearl would be focusing on our first grade literacy curriculum and I would be focusing on our second grade literacy curriculum. We just couldn't figure out how we could combine literacy with the two grades. We didn't think it would be beneficial to the students because of our district standards and the varying reading abilities.

Pearl continues where Rose left off.

Last summer we took a class together. Up to this point we were thinking a theme was like food or animals. That's not at all what it means. It has to be a bigger, broader concept like relationships or connections. So we brainstormed a whole list of these big themes or and then we chose Connections as our overall theme—how things connect to each other. This is what every lesson during projects time relates to, Connections.

There are many concepts and skills addressed at each grade level. The use of themes in an integrated thematic curriculum provides both an organizational tool for identifying learning objectives and a supportive context to construct meaningful and relevant knowledge (Rand, 1994). It is important to the success of integrated learning and thematic units that teachers have a sense of the overall picture of student growth and development that provides parameters within which to plan. As Rose and Pearl acknowledge, the overall picture includes the needs, interests, and developmental level of the students to help
define the parameters (Smith & Johnson, 1994). Rose gives an example of how planning for the interests and abilities of her students stays with her even during vacation.

It would be nice to be able to go home sometimes and not think about your job. I don't think a teacher ever does, even in the summer when you don't have students. This is especially true when you are a teacher in a looping classroom. You see something that reminds you of a certain student, or you are planning informally for the next year and you know the students' interests. You plan for that, it is always on your mind. I think that is why teachers always come back because they get ideas and get excited about sharing them with the students.

Teachers are always thinking about planning, but what is new is the fact that they are now seeking student input. Students have stronger desires to learn when they are provided opportunities to participate in the planning process than when they must follow the paths prescribed by teachers (Newkirk, 1991). Brainstorming with students encourages them to understand how themes and ideas are generated and teaches them themes and ideas must be developed. Having such a modeling process is especially helpful for students as they begin brainstorming their own lists for writing topics and other projects. Graham (1993) states that teaching through an integrated thematic curriculum approach encourages you to "decide ways of proceeding, to choose among alternative pathways, or to gain new understandings about yourself, the context of the situation, and your unquestioned assumption about the practice" (p. 34).

Individual learners bring unique networks of prior knowledge beliefs on each situation they encounter. These beliefs serve as the foundation for the acquisition and integration of new knowledge. Shapiro (1989) states, "It has been
demonstrated in numerous studies that learners more readily acquire new knowledge when they are able to relate new ideas to already existing ideas or to language which they already possess" (p. 714). In contrast to the constructivist understanding of learning, educational practice in America has been dominated by approaches in which the teacher's task consists of providing a set of stimuli and reinforcements for the purpose of getting students to emit a certain response.

Teachers such as Rose and Pearl understand that learning is complex and personal. The complexity of learning requires that teachers approach learning and teaching as uncertain processes (Henderson, 1992). These processes interact with each other based upon past and personal experiences. Reflection on these experiences impacts the connections and relationships established in new learning situations. When Rose and Pearl plan, they reflect upon their content knowledge, their students' interests and abilities, and possible teaching strategies in order to make learning more meaningful by adapting and shaping the curriculum to meet the needs of the students (Henderson, 1992). Self-reflection during planning opens the door to new possibilities and paradigms of teaching and thinking (Seely, 1994). As teachers and school districts move to looping classrooms, this reflection becomes increasingly more important.

**Curriculum Webs**

Curriculum webs can be seen as a way to bridge the gap between traditional skills-based planning and creating an integrated thematic curriculum. After a list of themes is generated, one method of brainstorming possible supporting activities for the theme is through a curriculum web (Rand, 1994). This method assumes a nonlinear curriculum in which long-term goals are more important than minute-by-minute accounting. Curriculum webs are a tool for developing thematic units. Webs enable teachers and students to visualize ideas...
and potential connections between themes and content areas. Placing ideas for themes into a web diagram "helps children link new learning to old and to organize mentally the information presented" (Rand, 1994, p. 180). The central focus of a web diagram in this context is the theme under construction. Ideas and interests generated by the teacher and students move out from the center, becoming possibilities. Curriculum webs can be as detailed as necessary. (See curriculum webs designed by Rose and Pearl in Appendices A-E.)

Putting the thematic subtopics into a web diagram helps link new learning to old and to organize mentally the information presented. This pictorial representation allows children to see the connections between areas of learning. For example, the curriculum web may present children with ideas for collaboration on topics that overlap, or ways in which materials can be shared as resources.

The difference in this approach is that the teacher and the children have a framework provided by the theme for organizing learning into relationships. Classroom activities are developed that relate to the theme through meaning, function, and purpose. Children need to know what they are learning, how the activity works, and why they are learning this information. A curriculum web can help provide meaning, function, and purpose by articulating the relationships within the topic of study.

An integrated thematic curriculum approach provides learners with endless possibilities. There are numerous pathways learners access to construct meaning, and an integrated curriculum approach validates and honors these various pathways. Learners bring to the process their own backgrounds and experiences to connect to the ideas and concepts presented in the classroom setting. Teachers like Rose and Pearl recognize the importance of learners'
backgrounds and place the emphasis of the curriculum and learning on problem solving, meaning making, and discovery.

Looping and Collaborative Planning

We must pay attention to the adults who open the doors, ring the bells, hand out the books and the homework assignments. And we need to pay attention not only the teachers' relations to the children, but to their relations to one another as well. What do they know of one another's work? When and how do they work together — if they work together? (Grumet, 1988, p. 21)

Rose and Pearl feel it is helpful to collaboratively plan their integrated thematic social studies and science curriculums for their looping classrooms. They plan specifically to help students learn reliable information about important topics in a contextualized, relevant, and authentic way. Through their team planning they discover new ideas and support each other in risk taking. Their collaborative planning is a support group of two. It has become their way to improve the educational climate for their children, their way of ensuring that they are offering their children a wide variety in their school day, and that they are giving them ownership and responsibility for their learning.

An important aspect of any change is a partner or partners. Whether it is a slight change in your homework policy or a more involved change such as looping, it is important and extremely beneficial to have the support, guidance and feedback of another teacher. It is highly recommended that teachers involved in multi-age or looping combinations have a team teacher or colleague with whom to share ideas and reflect (Villa & Thousand, 1988). Professional dialogue or collaborative planning may be perceived as a means of diagnosis, a time to think out loud, to explore, analyze, and to problem solve. Collaborative
planning involves time to listen, to share, and to interact. Rose and Pearl intuitively acknowledged this to be important by beginning their collaboration even before it was formalized for them through looping. As Pearl explains:

Even before we officially made the decision to plan collaboratively together and integrate our social studies and science curriculums into what we call our projects time, we always bounced ideas off each other. It was more informal. If something worked well in Rose's first grade, I'd want to try it in my room. Planning together has been a wonderful experience for me. It's nice having an idea in mind for the whole year and knowing that you have someone to talk to who is equally interested in what you are studying.

Collaboration itself is defined as a process (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin, 1986) or a style of interaction (Friend & Cook, 1990). It involves planning and problem solving in a team context that is created when two or more individuals are committed to achieving a mutually defined goal. By school definition, collaboration is the direct interaction between at least two equal parties who voluntarily engage in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal (Cook & Friend, 1991). Gable, Friend, Laycock and Hendrickson (1990) found that teachers may find collaboration to be a better way to serve a diverse group of students. Collaboration emphasizes team decision-making (Bauwens et al, 1989) and requires participants to share in the process of setting goals and implementing plans (Bauwens et al, 1989; Brookhart & Loadman, 1990; Cook & Friend, 1991; Lasley & Matczynski, 1992). Teacher collaboration is predicated on voluntary participation, mutual respect, parity among participants, a shared sense of responsibility and accountability, and an equitable distribution
of available resources (Cook & Friend, 1991). Rose speaks to the idea of mutual respect.

Both of us have a lot of respect for one another. At least I have tremendous respect for Pearl. We both are very receptive to each other's ideas because of the respect and also because of the trust that has grown from our friendship. Neither of us go into a planning session with the idea that it is my way or no way. It wouldn't work. We like to brainstorm all of our ideas and pick and choose the activities that fit best with these particular students and this particular time.

There are many forms of collaboration. Professional collaboration can include either direct or indirect instruction. Indirect collaboration generally takes place outside the instructional hours of the school day, such as before school, after school, or perhaps during a common teacher planning period. This is the type of collaboration with which Rose and Pearl are involved when they plan their social studies and science curriculums together.

Preliminary findings support the effectiveness of collaboration among teachers who are working to meet the challenges of students and to improve schools (Cuban, 1989; Morsink & Lenk, 1992; Self, Benning, Marston, & Magnusson, 1991). Collaboration approaches benefit both students and educators in a number of ways (Evans, 1991). Benefits of teachers' collaboration include intellectual challenges, changed routines, learning from students, validation of own skills, more reflection, an improved view of the teaching profession, and enhanced organizational commitment (Cousins, Ross, & Maynes, 1994). Rose and Pearl concur with Cousins. These teachers see that what they are doing is beneficial for kids. They plan based on student need, not because it is the next page in the book. Cousins, Ross, and Maynes (1994) found that
teachers were able to develop a more accurate and well-rounded knowledge of students in their class by collaborating with other teachers. Rose and Pearl find this to be true.

Teachers often complain that they have very rare opportunities to converse with colleagues. This idea may come as a surprise to many people, particularly those entering the profession. The image of being isolated doesn't easily fit with the picture many of us have of teachers. Huberman (1993) reminds us that many teachers derive their most important professional satisfactions from interactions with students instead of with peers. It is not from students that teachers are so isolated; it is from adults.

The feelings of isolation in schools begin when new teachers learn that entry to the teacher's world of work is done "person by person, each working largely in isolation from others" (Lortie, 1975, p. 74). Each teacher is assigned to a classroom, and although staff members are friendly to one another and may socialize outside the classroom (Little, 1982), when it is time to get on with teaching and planning, everyone literally or figuratively shuts his/her door. This situation often becomes the permanent state of affairs in teaching, "the base of their occupational culture" (Hargreaves, 1993, p. 72). Teachers can hardly escape the architecture of schools that organize classrooms into cellular patterns separating each one from the other. Rose acknowledges planning with a partner is indeed more difficult.

Without a doubt, planning with another teacher is definitely harder. Teaching has always been, and in most cases still is, a one person show so to speak. So often you have to think fast on your feet, that it can be difficult to verbalize your thoughts of what you envision, because it is so much easier just to do it. Pearl and I have known each
other for a long time and we kind of think the same. We can read each other's minds pretty well or remember an activity that the other one did that would be just perfect. Planning together has made us both better, even though it takes significantly more time.

Planning for Literacy and Looping: Rose's and Pearl's Experiences

Meaningful literature experiences form the core of literacy learning in both of these classrooms. Rose and Pearl both strive to create climates in which their learners use literature as grounding for decision-making and problem-solving. Literature offers these teachers and students a common experience that they use to expand their real and imaginary worlds as individuals and as classroom communities.

Rose and Pearl stated many times during interviews and casual conversations that they both believed that Whole Language philosophies best enhanced literacy learning in the looping classroom. Their implementation of some Whole Language strategies was evident in many of their classroom activities and in the use of particular teaching resources, such as the extensive use of children's literature. However, they also used literacy materials not associated with Whole Language such as their anthology reading series to evaluate students' reading fluency, reading comprehension, and to teach certain reading skills outlined in the Lakeville language arts scope and sequence statement. Although Rose and Pearl share similar beliefs about literacy practices, they plan and teach their literacy blocks individually, which they feel best addresses the literacy needs of their students. Therefore, in the following sections I will describe each teacher's literacy planning separately.
Rose's Literacy Planning

Rose McGlassen feels the greatest gift a teacher can give her students is a love of reading. She knows that reading encompasses all curricular areas. Without the ability to read, students are unable to function successfully in the classroom. Successful literature programs instill in children a true love for literature and reading. For Rose, literacy planning involves a combination of teaching basic skills while using both an anthology and real children's literature, what is typically called a balanced reading approach.

Teachers using a balanced reading approach focus on meaning and discovery rather than isolated skills. However, this does not mean that students will not acquire the skills necessary to become successful readers. In fact, children spend more time actually reading when teachers use a balanced reading approach, which improves their reading skills and abilities. According to the California State Department of Education's *Handbook for Planning an Effective Literature Program* (1988) students in traditional reading programs spend 75-90 percent of their time filling out worksheets and 10-25 percent of their time actually reading. In contrast, children in balanced reading programs spend 50-80 percent of their time actually reading.

When I asked Rose to explain how she plans her literacy block, she gave the following description.

I would say that I have a Whole Language program with phonics distributed throughout, at least at the first and second grades. I believe it is essential to read to my students every day, even more than just once. I plan so that they have opportunities to read individually, in pairs, and in small groups. They enjoy listening to stories on the headphones. I plan to give them many different opportunities to
participate in reading. I plan a learning activity each day during literacy block. Today they created their own monsters to go along with the story. Yesterday I had them find certain kinds of words. Yesterday they also wrote stories, so it varies on the skills needing to be taught and the needs levels. I guess I have a little bit of everything thrown into my literacy block.

In this narrative, Rose describes the balanced reading approach, combining Whole Language and traditional approaches. Whole Language philosophies are appealing to Rose because of their emphasis on using real children's literature in the classroom. However, even though she identifies herself as a Whole Language teacher, she also incorporates traditional approaches such as phonics and handwriting lessons from a workbook as the above narrative indicates. Rose continues her description of her literacy planning:

In Writers' Workshop I give them the opportunity to write about anything that they want to. We brainstorm lists of things that they can write about. After they have written something, I like to conference with them on their pieces. I look for things like capital letters, periods, question marks, letter formation, basic things like that. I know that every student in here can write a sentence, but through conferencing I can get a sense of where they are, the vocabulary they are using, and what skill lessons are needed.

Many times Rose plans for development of a particular skill based on what students have done in the classroom. For example, following the conferencing part of the Writers' Workshop described above, Rose noticed that some of her second graders were beginning to use dialogue in their writing. At this point she planned a lesson on quotation marks because the students had a real need to
know. Rose planned her lesson on quotation marks with a literature book that contained a great deal of dialogue, *Julius is the Baby of the World* (Henkes, 1990).

I observed her plan in action. After reading the book, she provided students time to practice using quotation marks by having several sentences from the story on transparencies on the overhead projector. The students enjoyed using the colored pens to place the quotation marks in the correct places. Rose also involved students with another hands-on activity to help them remember where to put quotation marks. She asked the students to cup their hands around the corners of their mouths. With a partner, students took turns talking and discussing with their partner where the quotation marks would appear. Listening in one partner group, Rose commented, "Would you say said Jamie?" The students giggled and shook their heads no. Rose continued, "Remember the talking marks go around only what the person or character says out loud. Give me another example so I can tell you understand how to use quotation marks." The students both give short examples, and Rose nodded her head and gave them both thumbs up approval. "Now you have got it!" Rose listened to other partner groups and made similar suggestions. Then Rose had the students return to the stories that they had written earlier. They were encouraged to go through their own stories, adding in quotation marks wherever appropriate, returning to their dialogue partners to check for accuracy.

Rose's plan created a meaningful and authentic context for students to learn an important skill, the use of quotation marks. By immediately using the skill with their own writing, it became a strategy that they understood and were better able to apply in a broader context in the future. Further, as these examples show, Rose combines Whole Language philosophies and traditional
approaches for a balanced reading approach in a meaningful way, but a fun way for the children.

The ethnographic research study by Cochran-Smith (1984) suggests an urgency for sharing literature with students in meaningful situations like the example above. This study demonstrates that literature plays an important role in the overall literacy development of students. Four important values of literature are presented in the Cochran-Smith study:

1. Listening to literature being read aloud forces students to utilize both memory and cognitive processes in order to comprehend the story.
2. Literature enhances imaginative and language development in students.
3. Students learn how stories are constructed from listening to them often. This in turn aids students in understanding new stories when presented to them.
4. Students learn about language skills while reading or listening to stories.

Currently, the use of trade books in literature-based instruction is touted as one means of increasing students' background knowledge and interest in textbook reading. As a result, many researchers and educators believe that literature should be a part of the daily curriculum in all elementary school classrooms (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Norton, 1987; Cullinan, 1989). Yet, in spite of the many benefits students gain from literature, it is not traditionally considered to be a subject taught in elementary schools.

When planning, Rose enjoys selecting a variety of literature books to share with her students. She chooses books for a variety of reasons.
I try to pick picture books that are not too long. I want to read everyday during our literacy block. I also read a chapter book in the afternoon. This time I picked an author who was the same as one of the stories from our anthology. I pick books that are relevant to the activities that we are doing that day or that week. I select books that naturally relate, but it is also important that they are not too terribly long so as not to take up a lot of time. Time is always a factor. The students love it when I read to them. I can just tell. I do it also to be a good role model for them so that when they are asked to read out loud, they know how to do so confidently and with expression. The chapter books are beginning to really interest them. They see it as a step in growing up to check one out at the library.

On another visit, Rose's objective for the literacy lesson was to teach cause and effect. She began with an inductive reasoning process requiring students to hypothesize which of the ten teacher generated sentences on a chart contained cause and effect as a common attribute. After students discovered the cause and effect attribute, she read *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985) to illustrate cause and effect, and concluded the lesson by asking students to write their own cause and effect statements.

As Rose introduces more literature to her students they have story links that connect their new learning to their previous knowledge. The stories form the seeds for later acquisition of a more thorough understanding of concepts. Rose's teaching is informed and deliberate. She has moved from text-oriented teaching to a holistic balanced reading approach to teach literacy in her looping classroom because it is more in accord to her beliefs about how children learn best.
Pearl's Literacy Planning

For Pearl Robinson, rotation time, a learning centers approach, is critical to her literacy curriculum. Planning for rotation time must be done carefully and extensively, a connection Pearl has made. Rotation time offers students a special area in the classroom where they can work independently or in small groups to build a concept, explore a topic or refine a skill. Pearl states that her rotation time supports an old Chinese proverb.

I hear, and I forget,
I see, and I remember,
I do, and I understand.

Rotation time also fits with John Dewey's philosophy that "learning is doing" (Pattillo & Vaughan, 1992). The teacher becomes a facilitator and observer while students learn by activity rather than passivity. Learning center teachers "must function more like orchestra conductors than like lecturers: getting things started and keeping them moving along, providing information and pointing to resources, coordinating a diverse but harmonious buzz of activity" (Goodlad & Oakes, 1988, p. 19).

Pearl is a highly organized instructor who strives to meet the needs of each one of her students. She feels frustrated at times when she realizes she is not able to meet all of the needs of her students.

The hardest thing is not having enough time to meet all the needs of the children. Everybody is coming in with such varied abilities. The needy child can't get all the time he or she needs. I could spend my whole day with one or two students.

Children in primary classrooms today represent a vastly more heterogeneous group than the children of even a decade ago (Gallo, 1990). The educational
needs of contemporary children are, therefore, more varied. Pearl designs her rotation time to better accommodate those various student needs.

In the following narrative she explains in detail how she sets up her literacy block for the week with varied instruction, and describes where the learning center rotation fits in.

We spend close to two hours a day working in our literacy block in here. On Monday I plan for us to work with the anthology program that we have with skills and introducing vocabulary. Then for a half an hour we have our rotation time, which is our learning centers. On Tuesday I decided that I need to do more with kids who have similar needs, so on Tuesday I have needs groups. They sit and read in what you might call a reading group. I really feel I can zero in on what the kids need that way. Fluency, decoding, just looking at words and being able to read the words, noticing punctuation, and knowing where to stop—all those types of things that are happening with emergent readers.

Pearl's rotation time provides her students with opportunities for constructing new knowledge and skills as well as providing the medium through which the curriculum content areas can be integrated. Pearl further elaborates on her rotation planning:

Wednesday is just like Monday. Thursday is like Tuesday. The needs groups, instead of working on reading out of a book, will work on a specific skill, dictated by student need. It might be working on word families, or it might be letter recognition. It all depends on what the students need. I really believe that Whole Language does not mean whole group all of the time. I really like having the opportunity to work with the students in these changing groups. Then on Fridays Rose and I plan our
literature day that goes along with what we are working on in our projects block.

Such variety in instruction is important. Research shows that individual learning styles vary, and students learn best if more than one method of instruction is utilized (Lazear, 1991). According to Day and Drake (1983), children develop independent learning skills and acquire as well as enhance existing knowledge and skills to provide the foundation on which new knowledge can be constructed and new skills acquired.

Pearl has her learning centers on a four-day rotation and, therefore, her students are placed in four groups that change throughout the year. Due to the fact that Friday is literature day, they do not have rotation on Fridays. During rotation one group is out of the room with Lana, the teacher associate assigned to a full inclusion student in Pearl's room, working at the computer lab. Another group is on the south side of the room where whole-class reading experiences take place, listening to a story with multiple headsets on and one student pretending to be the teacher by holding and turning the pages in the book. Out in the shared space between Pearl and Rose's rooms, the mother helper for the day will be playing one of Pearl's many drill and skill review games. This game will be the same throughout the week, even though the mother helpers are different each day. The rest of the students will be in a rotation group with Pearl working on the same skill that will be revisited with the mother helper. Sometimes, if needed, Pearl will have the same skill for another week if the students indicate it would benefit them.

Teachers who implement learning centers similar to Pearl's report that these small group stations provide effective, efficient instruction for the following reasons:
Centers promote active student involvement.
Centers allow students to move at their own rates and at their own levels of ability.
Centers provide students with opportunities to make choices.
Centers are flexible; they provide opportunities for students to work independently or cooperatively with other students.
Centers are compatible with thematic studies. (Bridge, 1994)

Traditionally, teachers rarely met with small groups of students as they were busy directing lessons to the entire class. When they did work with a few students at one time, other classmates were doing what most classify as "busy work" paper-and-pencil tasks designed to keep them busy. Pearl shared such an example earlier in this chapter about having her students do board work. Through rotation time and also through reader's club, Pearl is confident that she is able to make one-to-one connections with each of her students.

Through rotation, reader's club, and my flexible needs groups I feel good knowing that I will hear every child read to me at least twice a week, one-on-one. That's at the very least. I was feeling like I didn't have a good grasp on every student in my room. Through planning, I give my students a lot of choice, but I also make some choices for them.

It's not all one way or the other.

Learning centers provide the opportunities to learn with real objects (Pattillo & Vaughan, 1992). Students learn from each other through peer tutoring. As they work together to explore and experiment, students assist one another in creating knowledge and understanding. Research shows that only ten percent of students are capable of learning by reading from a textbook; in contrast, ninety percent are able to learn if they are actively learning with and
teaching others (Glasser, 1990). Learning centers enable Pearl to individualize the curriculum and better meet her students' needs.

Discussion

Rose and Pearl believe teaching students is more important than teaching a traditional prescriptive curriculum. Although Rose and Pearl still feel frustrated at times with too much to teach in too little time, even with their two year cycle, they decide which methods and materials will create successful learning environments and do not let prescriptive manuals or peer expectations determine the time they believe it takes to successfully teach. Pearl perceives that she and Rose plan and therefore teach differently from other teachers.

We are not concerned about getting to page 322 in our manual. If they learn what we teach them well, then they are going to be successful. Some teachers are more worried about covering the material more than they are about teaching the concepts and they would not devote an hour to a lesson like I have in the past. There are a lot of teachers in our building that are changing like Rose and I have. I think what we are trying to do has real payoffs.

Teaching well means Rose and Pearl plan flexibly enough to include unplanned "teachable moments," or students' issues. The unpredictability of teaching based on students' needs and interests and the interconnectedness of teaching ideas emerging from themes make planning and implementing daily lesson plans difficult. For example, during the previously mentioned cause and effect lesson, Colleen, a student, pointed out to the class that only one out of the ten cause and effect sentences students classified contained an opinion. "That is when you know you have done your job and you know it is relevant", states Rose.
When I asked her why she followed Colleen's comment with a class discussion on fact and opinion, she explained:

It was very applicable. It was important and it was a skill we have learned that she obviously had retained. She compared and contrasted on her own. It wasn't directed by me. It was one of those teachable moments. I pulled the whole class in so hopefully all the class revisited the skills right there in that five minute slot.

Rose and Pearl believe teaching students to think and bringing experiences to life in students' minds requires more than traditional text-based instruction. Pearl comments on this.

I think in a classroom where you are really emphasizing thinking and kids being actively involved and in lots of discussion, things do take longer. I think material is learned better and it is learned longer and hopefully will apply.

In our interview, Rose names several reasons for planning to teach about cause and effect. First, the district expects her to teach it. "It is an outcome we are expected to teach as part of our second grade curriculum." Outcomes are part of Lakeville's recent efforts to agree on what students in grades K-12 need to know. She supports and participated in teachers' recent development of language arts outcomes, although Rose wants to continue to have the freedom to develop and plan her own strategies to meet the outcomes.

We are revising our entire curriculum so we are doing different phases and our reading language arts curriculum has been totally teacher generated. We have teachers in different grade levels who have written outcomes per grade level and then we are determining what strategies to reach those outcomes with.
A deeper purpose for teaching cause and effect emerged as she discussed the context for her planned lesson. She had planned to integrate cause and effect into a two week long rain forest unit she had developed to go with the anthology. She does not believe in teaching skills in isolation. She created the high interest unit to integrate skills, such as cause and effect. "I am trying to extend so it is not a piece taken in isolation. It works perfectly with why we need to stop the devastation in the rain forest." She believes the lesson content is meaningful and relevant to students' lives.

I know I need to teach this skill. I hadn't taught it yet and decided how best I was going to teach it. I also thought about our work on the rain forest theme right now and I am leading into why we need to save the rain forests. As I have been thinking about planning for the rain forest unit, I thought that could be a good way to teach cause and effect. I knew I wanted to teach cause and effect so kids could understand what is causing this destruction to happen.

Rose introduced cause and effect to her second graders as a "teachable moment" earlier in the year: "Certainly we have talked about it in our literature and as we read different pieces about what caused that to happen, but they are not necessarily going to know that it is called cause and effect."

She feels students need a familiar context to begin building their understanding of cause and effect so she prepared ten cause and effect sentence strips the night before the lesson. She drew on her knowledge of students' experience to create the sentences: "Each of those sentence strips that I wrote were something they would have knowledge of." The sentence strips served as a link between what students currently understood and the new cause and effect
concept. Students compared and contrasted the sentences and decided which were cause and effect and which were not. Some of the sentences included:

I watered the plants so they wouldn't die.

Because it rained yesterday, I took my umbrella to school.

Listening to good advice helps you make good choices.

I love to read exciting books.

We are studying the rain forest during our literacy block.

After studying the cause and effect in the sentence strips, Rose read If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (Numeroff, 1985). The familiar story took cause and effect a step beyond the familiarity of the sentence strips into a more unfamiliar, but not foreign context. She accessed students' understanding as they created and shared their own cause and effect sentences at the end of the lesson. Within the next several days she taught cause and effect in the rain forest context.

Rose's academic purpose was to teach cause and effect as well as the social skills of appropriate disagreeing and active listening.

Besides just learning cause and effect, we are working on social skills because we are using cooperative groups which I think is real important. We are developing higher order thinking, we are working on extending their thinking and stretching that. We are working on how to come to a consensus. We are learning how to disagree and agree appropriately because in this kind of activity lots of kids will have opinions as to what they think the common concept is.

Planning integrated thematic approaches to curriculum and learning seems a natural fit with looping classrooms. The integrated thematic approach encourages students to come into activities utilizing their background knowledge to construct meaning. Through these understandings learners make connections.
Activities planned and developed in an integrated approach reinforce the interrelationship among ideas and concepts. These planned activities tie the theme and the content together in an authentic learning environment. Stevenson & Carr (1993) state that "it is through what children actually conceive, organize, do and present to us and others that their intellectual functioning can be seen and understood most clearly" (p. 21). Thematic units offer students the opportunity to grow holistically without compartmentalized learning.

Glickman (1990) noted that schools are atypical in that professionals who are responsible for the same clients are not provided time to "frequently and intensively engage with each other in discussions on how to improve their services" (p. 35). Rose and Pearl found that time problems could be alleviated through careful planning, regularly scheduled meetings and discussions on teaching. Finally, the workload can only be addressed as the team relationship develops. They found that planning to delegate tasks in a way that allowed each of them to focus on areas of expertise and interest was in the best interest for their students.

Bauwens (1989) cited another critical issue regarding collaborative partnerships—voluntary involvement. Setting up collaborative teaching arrangements by decree, without regard to input from the teachers themselves, will not set the stage for success for teachers and ultimately for the students. Collaboration holds great promise for addressing many of educators' demands for fundamental change in the schools, as well as creating a climate in which all students can become successful learners. Rose and Pearl find that their collaboration is driven by mutual respect for each other, shared decision making, shared resources, and consistency for the students. If structure for school change is mandated in a top-down fashion, then
often times school personnel feel forced to implement changes that are not consistent with their own notions of what is needed to improve the quality of education (Fullan, 1991). True collaboration structures evolve in schools when teachers come together to critically reflect on their practices and use these reflections to inform their decision making. Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) define collaborative cultures as "evolutionary relationships of openness, trust, and support among teachers where they define and develop their own purposes as a community" (p. 227). Rose and Pearl realize that they each have various contributions to make to their collaboration and that they were able to accomplish more together than they could achieve alone.

Their experience taught them that collaboration is not an easy endeavor. Over and over again, each of them struggles to redefine herself, her beliefs, and their collaboration. They came to honor the individual's voice as a contribution to their changing thoughts of what it means to collaborate and to make connections between planning, teaching, and learning. As they talked, worried, planned, and questioned, the value of having a partner crystallized. The concept of "we" took on new meaning. No longer did a teacher have to read, evaluate, explore, create, and plan by herself.
CHAPTER IV. LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM

When we enter a classroom, we soon have a sense of what pedagogy is practiced here. An elementary classroom speaks of the ways children come to know their world. (VanManen, 1986)

To understand the theoretical implications of any practices teachers adopt it is essential to talk to teachers and to observe these practices as they unfold in the classroom. In this chapter I attempt to provide a window into the lessons I observed to illustrate how Rose and Pearl implement plans in ways that maximize the benefits of integration and theme development. My goal is to explore the advantages that looping provides for learning when combined with other student-centered and age appropriate elements of instruction. In addition, I want to emphasize the type of classroom climate that can be created when looping is chosen as one important aspect of students' learning experience.

When teachers tell stories about their classrooms, the stories reveal the beliefs that teachers hold and the reasons for the learning environments they create. According to Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum, and Harding (1989), a belief is an attitude consistently applied to activities in which a person holding the beliefs is engaged. Several reviews of the research relating to teachers' thought-processing, reflect the concept that teachers' beliefs affect decisions, work activities, and teaching practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum, & Harding, 1989; Nespor, 1987). In fact, Spodek (1991) suggests that teachers' actions and classroom decisions are driven by their perceptions and beliefs. He further observes that teachers create conceptions of their professional world based upon their concepts of reality. These conceptions grow out of the way teachers interpret their perceptions in terms of the theories they hold implicitly.
Thus, these interpretations become the basis for teachers' decisions and actions in the classroom (Spodek, 1988).

Nespor (1987) found that teachers' beliefs and knowledge had a profound effect on the way they taught as well as on the way students learned in their classrooms. Similarly, Peterson, Fennema, Carpenter, and Loef (1989) studied the relationship between teacher beliefs and classroom practices in a sample of elementary school teachers who were implementing a new mathematics curriculum. Through the use of self-report questionnaires and self-report teacher interviews, Peterson et al. (1989) found that teachers' beliefs correlated with how they personally thought about teaching a new curriculum and to what extent they reported that they implemented the curriculum. Likewise, in their review of research on teachers' beliefs, Clark and Peterson (1986) analyzed nine studies examining the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices. Each study analyzed consisted of a sample of elementary school teachers teaching subjects such as language, mathematics, and reading in grades one through six. As measuring tools, teacher interviews and classroom observations were used. From their review of the results of these studies of teachers' beliefs and practices, Clark and Peterson (1986) found that teachers consistently employed practices that were related to their beliefs, particularly in orientation such as curriculum and children's learning. Thus Clark and Peterson (1986) conclude that educators' teaching practices are guided by a personally held system of beliefs.

Researchers who focus on teacher beliefs relative to their practices in the classroom report that teachers implement educational policies or methods according to the compatibility with their beliefs (Bauch, 1984; Wolcott, 1990; Heath, 1983). Some researchers suggest that when teachers consider educational
policies or methods to be compatible with their own beliefs, they reflect a tendency to take ownership (Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum, & Harding, 1989).

Roopnarine and Johnson (1993) also suggest that teachers' knowledge, coupled with their beliefs, values, and interests, affect decisions relative to curriculum and teaching practices. Since early childhood teachers are responsible for facilitating children's natural unfolding constructions of their environment (Piaget, 1955) through constant social exchange (Vygotsky, 1978), educating young children is a serious task for teachers (Derman-Sparks, 1992). To enhance this process, teachers must provide a high quality early childhood program in a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social emotional, and cognitive development of young children (Bredekamp, 1987).

According to early childhood scholars (Bredekamp, 1987; Elkind, 1987), a major determinant in this process of educating young children is teachers' knowledge of child development and its application in program practices; that is, the degree to which the program is developmentally appropriate.

Rose and Pearl choose to provide a developmentally appropriate and safe learning climate by implementing looping, and other child-centered approaches. To explain how these factors come together in their classes, I first describe the physical climates of their rooms. Next I briefly describe the influence Whole Language has had on their balanced reading programs. These frameworks are followed by narratives from Rose's and Pearl's classrooms. Their stories about, and my observations of how they implement their balanced reading program and other child-centered approaches demonstrate the ways both teachers put their beliefs about learning into practice. I conclude by discussing issues that arise from the observations.
Physical Climate

The concepts of active, hands-on learning and flexible grouping determine the physical organization of these looping classrooms. Along with learning experiences and the emotional climate, the physical layout and setup of the classroom support the teacher's philosophy and teaching. The way teachers organize their classrooms affects children's views of themselves as learners and has impact on their attitudes toward school and learning. Child-centered classrooms like Rose's and Pearl's have distinctive looks and feels that are noticeable when visitors walk in the door.

Within the four walls of the classroom, students and teachers explore, discover, collaborate, negate, and participate in a variety of tasks and activities. The classroom often extends beyond the four walls, but for most of the instructional time, students and teachers are working inside the classroom structure. In Rose's and Pearl's classrooms different projects and activities go on simultaneously. Students move through various centers and spaces during the course of the day. Movement in the classroom is frequent, and the arrangement of the furniture and materials is important to the effectiveness of the learning environment. Accommodating students, the teachers, parent volunteers, and the numerous activities within the room itself is dependent on the organization of the materials and furniture, and the attitudes of the teachers that can encourage or discourage activities.

Classrooms come in all shapes and sizes; however, the teachers in this study have exactly the same size and shaped classroom. Of course, each has made her classroom come to life to reflect her tastes and the interests and needs of her students. Teachers take what is available and make the best of what they have. This may mean bringing in outside resources and furniture to create
comfortable reading areas or using storage bins in which students place their belongings for the day. In many classroom, teachers like Rose and Pearl are often creative in designing a functional and effective environment.

Theilheimer (1993) states that rich, inviting areas stimulate emergent curriculum, which is appropriate for every child. Rose's and Pearl's looping classrooms' environments are very stimulating, and the themes under study are evident. Gaustad (1992) agrees that nongraded classrooms can and usually do differ physically from graded ones. Rose and Pearl have learning centers scattered around their rooms, including mathematics materials, art materials, a library corner with bean bag chairs and book-filled shelves. Gaustad explains that the materials in such a classroom are geared toward hands-on learning. For example, instead of only learning mathematics from workbooks children discover basic mathematical relationships by sorting, counting, and measuring real objects.

One of the first things I notice when entering the side-by-side rooms of Rose McGlassen and Pearl Robinson is the number of books everywhere. Books are visible on nearly every surface, singly, in bins, in book display stands, lying flat, standing upright, or on the reading center carts. Most of the books are paperback rather than hard cover. Rose and Pearl have assembled these large quantities of books to help implement their teaching philosophies. Substantial personal purchases through the years have made it possible for them to accumulate their extensive libraries of books and materials.

Listening centers are at the front of the rooms and are equipped with multiple sets of student headphones and a tape recorder. Listening centers are used by up to five students can frequent the listening centers at one given time. A wide variety of listening materials is available, classical music as well as
stories on tape. Some of the story tapes are commercially produced, and others have been made by the teachers, parents, and students in the classes.

Another learning area in each classroom provides opportunities for art exploration. This area invites children to express themselves creatively. The equipment includes an easel, various kinds of art paper, paint, crayons, chalk, scissors, glue, clay, and a box with scraps of ribbon and wallpaper samples. This area in both rooms is located by the sink for quick cleanups.

Each classroom has one Macintosh computer that is connected to the Internet. These computers are used for tutorials, drill and practice, and simulations. The computers are popular places to be during choice time.

In Rose's classroom one of the learning centers is a Lego table that has been purchased for every second grade classroom in North Brook Elementary. In Pearl's first grade classroom, the students enjoy a sand exploration table complete with measuring cups and spoons. Other than these differing stations, the rooms are very similar in nature due to the collaborative planning of the two teachers.

In Rose's and Pearl's rooms chairs and desks in groups replace rows of student desks. Areas of the room are divided into small, interesting-looking work areas. Other classroom furniture includes floor chairs and brightly colored pillows. Pearl even has a brightly colored sofa in the rear of her classroom. The classrooms literally invite children to learn by providing comfortable places to work and read. Children's work, drawings, and projects are attractively displayed throughout the rooms. These classrooms are equipped and arranged to provide challenging opportunities for all children to work and learn.

The physical structure of the room informs the reader about each teacher's beliefs. To engage in developmentally appropriate educational practices, a
teacher must have a thorough understanding of child development and of the
importance of age appropriateness and individual appropriateness to the
designing of learning environments for young children.

Learning Climate

The physical aspects of a classroom are only part of what make up the
learning climate. Climate is another essential element, the atmosphere of the
day to day life of the classroom created by the people in it. The teacher plays a
pivotal role in establishing the tone and structure of the classroom climate, Rose
and Pearl are no exception. Possibilities begin with a teacher's philosophical
perspective on learning, teaching, and managing twenty-five or more students. It
is through the teacher's beliefs about students and learning that management
and organizational strategies implemented in the classroom come into practice.
In this regard, Moos (1979) notes that "the teacher appears to be more important
than the characteristics of the pupils in climate creations" (p. 256). He
envisioned the classroom climate to consist of the teacher's behavior, interactions
between the teacher and the students, and interactions among the students.

Creating and maintaining a positive classroom climate for teaching and
learning is a desirable goal of any school community. Students spend a great
amount of time in school classrooms. Goodlad's (1984) research estimates that
elementary teachers' instructional time is about 22.4 hours a week.
Consequently, the quality of life in these classrooms is important, and students'
reactions to and perceptions of their school experiences are significant.

When we talk about changing the learning climate, we have to address a
myriad of issues. In Life in a Crowded Place: Making a Learning Community,
Peterson (1992) outlines thought and practices that permeate every aspect of
school. If we are to provide children with opportunities to make meaningful
choices from excellent possibilities, we shall have to move from traditional ways of going about it. The teaching reflected in many classroom settings today reflects the transactional model of teaching through a variety of learning and teaching contexts. Examples of varied contexts may involve students clustered into centers to work in pairs or in small groups, without a teacher immediately present; teachers meeting with individuals or small groups; and children sometimes engaged in independent study. The transactional model is described in *The Literacy Dictionary* (1995) as the "view that meaning is constructed in communication through language by an active fluid exchange of ideas within a given context, as between reader and text or between speaker and audience". Teachers with a transactive stance believe learning occurs through collaboration and interaction, that is two way dialogue. Students and the teacher listen and respond to each other, constructing new interpretations. The climate set by the teacher provides students with a sense that there are many ways to learn new information. The teacher structures activities to encourage discussions. A transactional model of teaching focuses on creating a climate of collaborative learning and emphasizes the interaction among all of the classroom participants.

**The Whole Language Influence on a Balanced Reading Approach**

Like the physical structure and climate of their rooms, the structure and content of Rose's and Pearl's approaches to teaching are also designed to foster discovery, activity, and involvement appropriate for their students. A balanced reading approach is central to the instructional climate they foster. The ethnographic data and analysis in this chapter will show how Whole Language has had an influence on Rose and Pearl and is critical to their daily teaching, even though they also implement traditional strategies.
As discussed in Chapter III, literacy is a major component of Rose's and Pearl's classrooms. Rose and Pearl both express that they are in accord with Whole Language philosophies for these reflect how they feel students learn. As I discussed in the previous chapter, while they identify themselves as Whole Language teachers, they do implement traditional instructional strategies, thus giving them a balanced approach to literacy instruction. Even though a balanced reading approach is used, what is important to acknowledge is that Rose and Pearl resonate with particular dimensions of Whole Language instruction. Aspects of the Whole Language movement that are most apparent in their balanced reading approach are: the use of real children's literature; skills are taught within a meaningful content; reading, writing, listening, and speaking are interconnected; and there is a focus on students' reading interests.

As the ethnographic data and analysis in this chapter will show, although they implement traditional instructional strategies where they feel they are needed, Whole Language is central to their balanced reading approaches. Learning to read through a balanced reading approach means that language users make use of their existing language competence and of the meaningful context in which language processes function. Rather than learning to read by only sorting out letters, words, and letter sounds, they learn through reading real literature. Further, the balanced reading approach incorporates the Whole Language philosophies that the whole is always more than the sum of the parts, and the value of any part is learned within the whole utterance (Goodman, 1989). Christensen (1990) explains that Whole Language is a psycholinguistic movement and a philosophy of learning which stresses that language acquisition be integrated into the child's functioning in the environment. According to
Christensen (1990), whole language suggests that reading can be learned through use in meaningful situations.

**Grouping and Regrouping**

Grouping for instruction in many ways is a key factor for instruction in Rose's and Pearl's looping classrooms. Children are grouped for specific and temporary purposes, and frequently regrouped by different criteria. As discussed in Chapter I, teaching for multiple purposes requires a redefinition of the teacher's role. The looping classroom teacher, as with any teacher who believes in the necessity to meet the needs of each student, cannot use whole-class delivery as the means for all instruction. Students have different ability levels, different interests, and different needs. Consequently, the teacher must group students in ways that accommodate this diversity, especially as they change over a two year period. Grouping should combine the best of individualized instruction, small-group instruction, and whole-group instruction.

Whole-class experiences occur every day, and many are part of the daily routine in both of these classrooms. Rose and Pearl interact with their children as a whole class for a variety of purposes. First, to establish a feeling of belonging, of being a class, Rose holds morning meetings in which her class talks about events in students' personal lives, planning the day, and giving compliments to each other. The children are randomly seated in a large circle on the floor in the center of the room for the morning class meeting. Following the class meeting, Rose shares a picture book that is usually connected to the literacy theme under study. For this, the students move to the reading corner and are grouped closer together.

I just think it is real important why I feel closer to them and I think they feel closer to me and each other so I always do that. We have
literature together all over at my chair on the floor, they are all so cozy
and they feel comfortable and I think learning in this way is more
advantageous.

Rose's close proximity to students and students' close proximity to one another
encourages relationship building and positive student management.

I bring them to the floor because I want them to center around me,
almost like a big book story telling that they are used to from last year
when they were in first grade. That's the kind of situation when we
want the kids in close proximity, that helps them give more attention to
what we are talking about. I read where it is important to have that
community of learners because in order to feel that we are together in this
and that it is important we are together and then together we can
help one another. I'm probably on the floor more than the average
teacher because I like them around me. I like to be around them and I
think it is important to be around one another.

Such pedagogy legitimizes conversation and increases student interaction. Rose
taps into the power of social interaction in order to support one another's
learning. As stated earlier in this chapter, the physical arrangements in both of
these looping classrooms provide beneficial socializing atmospheres. The result
are caring and hardworking communities focused on their learning.

Whole-class instruction is also used for academic situations. For example,
at the introduction of the farm animal literacy unit, Pearl engaged the whole
class in making a K-W-L (What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned)
chart. Traditionally, classroom decisions have been considered the teacher's
domain, but by implementing strategies like the K-W-L chart, Pearl
demonstrates the importance of including children in classroom decisions. Pearl and Rose both usually introduce new concepts to their classes as a whole.

Although whole-class teaching and learning activities are useful in many situations, as mentioned previously they are not always appropriate. Rose and Pearl both feel the need to interact with a smaller number of students so that they can give them more attention and assistance. They focus on the needs of the learners in specific learning contexts rather than grouping them by ability.

Rose and Pearl express that it was extremely important for them to remember the reasons for their looping classrooms when grouping students. They feel that if students are grouped homogeneously (based on ability) for activities, they might as well be placed in a traditional graded classroom. When students are grouped in a variety of ways, like is evident in these looping classrooms, learning and instructional time is maximized. In *What is a Nongraded Primary?* Davis (1992) shares five flexible groups in which students may be grouped in addition to whole group, as stated by the Manitoba Department of Education:

- problem-solving groups
- needs-requirement groups
- interest groups
- reinforcement groups
- learning-style groups

Teachers need to make informed, logical grouping decisions based on lesson plans and individual student needs. Using only one method of grouping is not sufficient for a looping classroom and can be detrimental to the progress and development of the students. The key is to find the appropriate balance of groupings to provide the best possible learning climate.
Rose and Pearl used flexible groupings in the following ways. In Chapter III, Pearl describes how she forms temporary groups during her rotation time based on common needs that are always changing. Both teachers have "reading clubs" where the children read orally in groups of four or five, from self-selected books one day a week. As well as eliminating the problems associated with traditional reading groups, Rose and Pearl feel their reading clubs allow more purposeful oral reading practice, more authentic audience situations, effective peer modeling, and valued opportunities for the students to interact and respond to each other. Students in both classrooms choose which day of the week they will participate in reading club.

When students share a common interest they often choose to work together, particularly during the integrated social studies and science block when students are actively working on hands-on projects. For example, one group of students in Rose's classroom was fascinated with competitive ice-skating. Therefore, during the time that the theme was focused on the Olympics, these students researched and presented to the class a presentation that explained what the ice-skating terms are and what they mean, who the United States competitors were and where they were from, and also kept the class updated on how these Olympians had placed.

Rose and Pearl believe that their looping classrooms allow them to give more individualized instruction to their students over the two year period, than students would receive in a traditional one year classroom. One-on-one instruction occurs informally as Rose and Pearl circulate around their classrooms while their children are at work. Often these teachers assist an individual student one-on-one following a whole-class or small group lesson.
Both classrooms have sustained silent reading times. Rose calls this time, C.A.R.E. time (Choose and Read Everyone). Pearl on the other hand refers to this time as D.E.A.R. time (Drop Everything and Read). Both teachers believe that once students are able to do something independently, they should be given time for independent practice, like during their sustained silent reading times.

The groupings described here are not unique to looping classrooms. However, if looping classrooms are approached with a graded mindset, expecting the same from each child at a given time, then nothing much has changed. It has been shown that we need to group flexibly to meet our instructional purposes and to support students' learning. Looping classrooms like Rose's and Pearl's enable us to transform the way we think about learning and teaching by compelling us to acknowledge diversity and to use it in supporting the learning of our children.

First Half of a Looping Cycle: An Inside Look

The looping assignment is essentially a very simple concept; but in Lakeville it's part of a complex collection of instructional strategies that include emphasis on critical thinking skills, cooperative learning, and teaming of students and teachers. It is essential that we take the time to look at typical classroom practices as they occur. The digitized school bell rings exactly at 8:10 a.m., and the first graders in Mrs. Pearl Robinson's classroom are seated and waiting for the school-wide announcements to be made from the principal's office by one of the fifth graders. The announcement comes on and says: "Good morning, students at North Brook. Today is Spirit Day. There will be a fire alarm today. Please make sure you discuss it in your rooms with your teachers. Have a good day and please stand to say the Pledge of Allegiance." The first graders stand and say the pledge along with the rest of the school.
Mrs. Robinson takes a few minutes to talk about the upcoming fire alarm and answers some questions. "No, I do not know what time it will happen. If you are in the bathroom, hurry back to our classroom or go out the outside door I told you about and find our class. Yes, we will have more than one drill, but Mr. Dean told us to expect it today because it is the first one of the year." Mrs. Robinson cuts short the endless questions by saying there will be time for more questions after the fire alarm.

Let's read the sentence on the front board together. Say it up here (pointing to her head) first; then we will say it out loud together. Ready? Today is Friday! Very good, class. Who can tell me what this is called or what it means at the end of the sentence? (Upon receiving a correct answer) she replies, Wonderful, you remembered! I'm going to be excited to see these start to appear in your own writing because I know you are excited about a lot of things. Let's read the next sentence together. It is September 5, 1997. Excellent! Why would there be an exclamation mark after today is Friday and not this sentence? Yes, because we are usually excited for the weekends! Okay, we need to do attendance and lunch count before we move to the floor. I need a helper who hasn't had a turn yet.

Thus, a typical day in Pearl's first grade begins. Once the daily chores of attendance and lunch count are completed, the children move quickly and quietly to the floor space while reciting aloud a memorized poem that is also posted on a chart on a chart in the reading floor area.

"Question"

by

Mary Ann Hoberman
The grownups say I'm growing tall
And that my clothes are growing small.
Can clothes grow small?
   I always think
That things grow big
Or else they shrink.
But did they shrink
   Or did I grow
Or did we both change?
   I don't know.

Pearl compliments the students at how well they are learning the poem reciting it clearly, and moving quietly to the reading area. Even this simple part of the classroom routine is multi-layered with integration and embedded learning. She talks briefly to them about birthdays.

This weekend we have three birthdays in our classroom. These are the first birthdays we have had this year. We do special things for your birthday, just like you do at home with your families. First, here is a sticker that says, "Happy Birthday!" That way everyone in the whole school will see your sticker and know it is your special day or close to it. Next, we will light your candle on the September birthday cake on the birthday wall. That shows us that your birthday has occurred. Last, but not least, for your birthday you usually get a birthday present. Right? I have a special bookmark for each of you that says, "Happy Birthday!" that you can put in your favorite book. We'll sing the birthday song later, maybe when we have your treats.
The three birthday students come up front and get their special tokens. Pearl calls on the three of them to put up the date on the calendar. Together the class reviews that today is Friday, yesterday was Thursday, and tomorrow will be Saturday. Again, we have examples of integrated learning here. While celebrating birthdays, the class is reviewing the order of the days of the week.

It is now time to read a picture book, which routinely begins the literacy block. Pearl has chosen one of her favorites, she tells the students, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst (1984). She begins by telling the students,

Mrs. Robinson has bad days once in awhile. Do you? Tell the person sitting next to you quickly about a bad day or something bad that happened to you that messed up your day. (Students eagerly share with a partner.) It's just one of those things, isn't it? You have to keep in mind that it won't last forever, and you are not alone. We all have bad days. Sometimes we are happy because we are having a happy day, and things are going great. Show me with your face and not your voice what your face looks like on a good, happy day. But, sometimes we are upset because our day is just not going well. Show me what your face looks like on one of those bad days. From the title of our book, show me the face that you think Alexander would have?

Each morning, during the literacy block, Pearl shares at least one picture story book such as *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1984). She believes in immersing her beginning readers in print, a key Whole Language belief. When books are shared with the class, students are typically gathered around Pearl who is in a small sized rocking chair. The students are seated on the floor.
Pearl discusses authors and illustrators of books and usually allows students to respond to stories after they were read using both comprehension questions and reader response questions. For example, during another picture book sharing this conversation occurs.

Pearl: "What did you think about Tikki Tikki Tembo?"
Student #1: "I like it."
Pearl: "I did too."
Student #2: "Yeah."
Pearl: "What did you like about this book?"
Student #3: "I liked the way the words were said over and over again because I though it sounded neat."
Student #2: "I liked it when they got him out of the well."
Pearl: "Who were some of the characters in this book?"
Student #4: "Tikki Tikki Tembo, his brother and his mother."
Pearl: "Good. What happened to the main character?"
Student #4: "He fell down into the well."
Pearl: "How did they finally get him out?"
Student #5: "Well, his brother tried to tell everybody to help him and the name was so long, and he always got so out of breath trying to say it real fast. But finally they understood and the people went to get him out of the well."

All books shared in this manner during the literacy block relate to broad themes of study.

In another learning snapshot, when making the distinction between fiction and nonfiction books, Pearl uses the terms "made up" and "real" with the students. She explains to the students that some books contain "made up" things
in them, such as Tikki Tikki Tembo retold by Arlene Mosel (1992), and some books contain "real" events, such as the book she had read earlier in the week, China by Suzanne Ogden (1995). After sharing books with students, she sometimes asks them whether the books contain "real" or "made up" things. Another picture book sharing time shows Pearl talking about beautiful illustrations.

Pearl: "Boys and girls today I am going to read a book to you called Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears. The author of this book is Verna Aardema (1975). Notice the medal on the cover of the book. Remember that means this book won an award for having beautiful pictures in it. While I'm reading I want you to listen to see if this book has real things in it or made up things.

(She reads the book out loud.)

Student #1: "It had made up things in it."

Pearl: "That's right. What things were made up in this book?"

Student #1: "All of the animals talked to each other like people and in real life animals don't do that."

Pearl: "Very good, that's right."

Pearl talks extensively with students about children's authors' various writing styles. She discusses with students that some authors are funny and some authors are sad when they write stories. After sharing Arnold Lobel's (1970) Frog and Toad are Friends, Pearl discusses Lobel's use of dialogue in this book between the characters Frog and Toad. She explains that using dialogue to tell a story, as Arnold Lobel did, is part of the author's style of writing.
Sometimes, Pearl talks about the main characters, plot, and setting of stories she shares aloud with the students. She explains to students the setting of stories is "the place where the story happens," and the plot of stories is "what happens in the story." Often, prior to reading stories, she identifies the setting for the students with such comments as, "this story takes place in the woods," "this story happens in a city," "this story happens on a farm," or "this story takes place in another country." Other times, she asks her students to identify the setting after stories were read aloud by asking such questions as, "Where did this story happen?" and "Who can tell me where this story takes place?" Still other times, the setting is not discussed.

Usually after reading stories aloud, she asks students to identify the main character and to tell what happened. This comprehension activity involves students in retelling stories in their own words. For example, one day after reading aloud Doctor De Soto by William Steig (1982), the following interaction takes place.

Pearl: "Who can tell me who the main characters were in this book?"

Student #1: "The doctor, the fox, and his wife."

Pearl: "That is right. Were there any other characters in the story that might not have been what we call main characters?"

Student: #1 "Um, well, some of the other animals that went to see the doctor for their teeth. They were in his waiting room sometimes."
Pearl: "Very nice! You’re correct. They were characters in the book, but not main characters. Who can tell me in their own words what happened in this story?"

Student #2: "I will. You see Dr. De Soto is a dentist, and all these animals come to him for help. One day a fox has a real bad toothache and comes to get it fixed. You see, foxes like to eat mice, and he decides he wants to eat Dr. De Soto and his wife."

Pearl: "You have started us out well with the first part of the story. Who can continue?"

Student #3: "Well, the mice are really smart. They figure out what he's going to do and plan a plan not to get eaten. This plan is to glue the fox's mouth shut so he won't eat them. Then he leaves and everything is okay."

Pearl: "Excellent."

Pearl spends a great deal of time discussing with students why characters in stories are important and, in her own words, "How the characters help the story to happen."

In Pearl's classroom a variety of literature extension activities are provided for students. A big book of Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1979) made by students earlier in the year is still in the reading center. Several students were observed taking this and other class-created big books to their desks to read during independent reading time. After reading *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1984), the students made paper bag puppets. On one side they drew their happy faces when they were having a good day. On the other side they each drew their unhappy faces when things weren't going right. Then Pearl gave them situations and had them hold up their puppets to show what face they would show if that incident occurred.

Pearl tries to read more than one book aloud to her class each day. She usually starts the day with a picture book after the class has finished the morning routine of doing the calendar. Between 8:20 and 8:30 she reads a picture storybook that is related to a thematic unit of study. Towards the close of the day she reads to her students again. Some weeks she reads the same picture storybook more than once if she feels it will benefit the students' comprehension and enjoyment. Pearl likes reading to the children.

I enjoy reading to my students because I know it is a time when they are relaxed, but learning. As first graders at the beginning of the year, they enjoy being read to a lot. It really helps to get them ready to read on their own, which some of them know how to do when they come in here, but the majority do not. I want them to like reading, so I must project an image that I love to read! That is very important, and I do. They like gathering around the rocking chair and listening to me first thing in the morning. It seems to make sense to start our literacy block with a read aloud.
For classroom reading instruction, Pearl uses an anthology in addition to multiple copies of paperback trade books. She values children’s literature as a useful teaching tool and states during an interview that she prefers using trade books for instruction, but at times feels the need to use the anthology.

I feel the anthology is okay, not wonderful by any means. We don’t have a lot of trade books in first grade, so sometimes it is hard to come up with enough copies for everyone. I have multiple copies of some books. A lot of teachers do in this building, but we would all struggle without the anthology. I don’t think our series does a very good job teaching skills. Not that I think skills are the one and only thing, but I think children must have some background before they can be expected to learn, and I feel our skills are rather hit or miss in our anthology. Sometimes they seem to be connected to nothing. I feel it is my job to make them connected.

As indicated earlier, not only does Pearl connect the skills that need to be taught in a meaningful context, but she also connects the students to each other through the use of many different flexible groups. Pearl does not ability group for reading, therefore her flexible groupings change throughout the year.

Pearl also believes that variety in instruction is also very important. Research shows that individual learning styles vary, and students learn best if more than one method of instruction is utilized (Lazear, 1991). Pearl’s literacy block is an example of her attention to detail and also of her years of experience in action. She explains how she instructs her literacy block.

My reading block, or what I call literacy block, I spend about an hour and a half a day on. Each day is designed to offer different learning. On Monday, though, I spend about an hour working on the anthology with
skills and introducing vocabulary. Then for a half an hour we have our rotation which are our learning centers. On Tuesdays I decided that I need to do more work with the students that have similar needs. On Tuesdays I do needs groups. They sit and read in what you might call a reading group. I really feel I can zero in on what the students need in that way. Fluency, decoding, just looking at words and being able to read words, noticing punctuation and knowing where to stop, all those types of things.

She continues:

Wednesdays are like Mondays. Thursday is like Tuesday, but my needs groups, instead of working on reading out of a book, I work with them on a specific skill. It might be word families, it might be letter recognition, it all depends on what the students need at that time period. What one group is ready for, or what one group needs, isn't what each group needs. I really feel I get to know my students and what they are capable of better in these groups and I like that.

The above narratives are powerful because they tell us that Pearl uses multiple instructional strategies and flexible groupings. As I discussed earlier, such diversity of instruction and grouping is extremely beneficial to students. Further, the above narrative illustrates how Pearl's flexibility gives her the opportunity to address individual student needs in multiple ways. As I will discuss in the conclusion, looping can be credited with enhancing these very important aspects of Pearl's classroom.

Full Circle: Completing the Second Year Loop

Now that we have visited the first half of a looping classroom, let's visit a classroom completing the second year of the loop on the first day of school. It is
9:00 a.m. on the first day of school at North Brook Elementary. School has been in session only fifty minutes and reading instruction has begun in this second grade classroom. The Kleenex, glue, markers, and other new school materials have been collected and put away. A fun name game has been played, and three new class members have been introduced. Lunch count and attendance procedures have been accomplished with minimal assistance from the teacher. In this short time students have been out of their seats and up to a whole class circle, back to their seats for independent time, and now are back up to the front of the room in a reading circle. The routine seems natural to the students. In any traditional second grade classroom, lunch money would still be needing to be collected.

There are many benefits from a looping program, but one of the greatest is the additional learning time that occurs because significant time has been saved at the beginning of the second year of each subsequent loop. This is accomplished by not having to repeat routine procedures and practices, reestablish behavior standards and expectations, and develop individual and group responsibility, accountability and independence in the learning climate.

Rose McGlassen asks the students to gather for their literacy block. She has selected the picture book *Good Morning, Miss Gator* (Kraus, 1989) which focuses on a typical school day, to read out loud to the group. It also fits with the upcoming theme on animals, as the teacher is an alligator. Rose begins by stating the following in a rather quiet voice.

Today I have chosen a book I think you will enjoy. From the title, *Good Morning, Miss Gator*, what do you think this book will be about? Remember how we like to predict what will happen in the story. Use all the clues you can find from the cover of the book.
Amy offers, "The book will be about a teacher who is an alligator and eats the children!" Another child, Brian offers, "The book will have a lot of other animals in it, not just alligators." Rose questions her students to think about whether the book will be fiction or real life and why. Joy thinks it must be fiction because alligators can't be teachers. Her comment leads to a side discussion between two students who think that alligators do teach their babies. To bring them back to the reading activity, Rose begins to read, and the students quiet down to listen. Throughout reading the story, Rose changes her voice volume and tone depending on the character she is depicting, which makes the children giggle at times.

When Rose finishes the picture book, the children return to their desks to retrieve their reading anthologies that were on top of their desks when they arrived at school this morning. So far, the school day has started off with no interruptions, and things are right on schedule. While the children get their anthologies, Rose goes to the sink and pours water into a plastic container and exclaims, "Oh my! I have a leak in my bucket! Does anyone have any ideas how I could fix it?" Immediately the students scramble back up to the reading circle to start offering suggestions.

Rose writes down all the suggestions, which range from using tape or gum to going to the store and purchasing a new one, on a large sheet of chart paper. She instructs the students that the first story that they will be reading in their anthology has to do with her dilemma.

Thinking of my current problem with my leak, what story in our anthology would have something to do with this? Where do we need to look for some clues? Who remember what that is called? The place we look at in the anthology to find our about where stories are?
Hands shoot up in the air. She calls on Zach, one of the new students, who looks eager to share. Zach replies, "Page 4, the table of contents." Everyone seems to agree as hands go down and heads shake yes. Rose has Zach choose one of his new classmates to answer the next question. "What is the name of the story we are looking for, and on what page number does it begin?" Zach calls on Daniel, a friend he has just met, who confidently replies, "The story is called 'There's a Hole in my Bucket' and it is on page 32." The school year has started, but in this classroom it seems like they are picking up where they left off.

Later on in the year, Rose continues to gather her students around her for portions of the literacy block. Today she is going to talk about main characters in stories.

Rose: "There's something I've noticed about authors and how they help us know who the main characters are in their stories. Do you have any ideas how authors do that?"

Student #1: "Sometimes their picture is on the front cover."

Student #2: "The name of the character is in the book."

Student #3: "Maybe the name of the character is the same as the authors."

Rose: "Very good ideas. I've brought several of the books that we have read during story sharing time this year. In Clifford's Tricks Bridwell, (1985) (she holds up the book) the author helps us figure out who the main character is in several ways, some of which you have already mentioned. First, the main character's name is in the title. Next, I see Clifford's picture on the front cover. When I look through the books, I see him just about on every page. Those are
all clues the author gives me. But know you know what? The biggest clue is that the story is mainly about Clifford and all the tricks he can do. Norman Bridwell really helps me figure out who the main character is. Can you think of a book that has the main character's name in the title?"

Student #4: "I'm reading a Ramona book called Ramona Quimby: Age 8 (Cleary, 1981)."

Student #5: "Babe the movie is about a pig named Babe, and I think there is a book too."

Rose: "You are right. Many times movies are made after a book has been written. I really liked the movie Babe. Can we think of any more books that have main characters in the title?"

Student #6: "Arthur's New Puppy (Brown, 1993) and all of the Arthur books."

Student #7: "Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty."

Rose: Wonderful! When you think of it there are a lot of books that fit into that category. Here's another book, Just For You, by Mercer Mayer (1983). In this book, there is no name in the title to help us. But I've read other books like this by Mercer Mayer, and I know and you know who these books are about. On the count of three tell me the name of the main character in this series. One, two, three.

Students: "Critter!"

Rose: "You are all right. I see Critter's picture on the cover, and when I look through the book, I see his picture on every
As I read the book I can tell that the story is mainly about Critter and all the things he tries to do for his mom, so I can predict that he is the main character. Here is another book, *Two Bad Ants*, by Chris Van Allsburg (1988). Do you get the idea that there are two main characters? The title talks about two ants, we see both ants on the cover of the book, and if I turn open the pages, I see that the two ants are usually together. When I read the story, I know that there are two main characters because the ants are always together and do the same things. Today, during C.A.R.E. (chose and read everyone) time if you are reading a book that tells a story, see if you can figure out who the main character is and how you know. What clues did the author give you? During reader's club this week, we will be focusing on main characters as well. You may return to your desks for C.A.R.E. time."

The students in the classroom rush back to their desks now that Rose has led them through a very detailed lesson. These students are learning about reading through many different opportunities, one of them being reader's workshop, a child-centered approach to teaching reading that brings the "real" world of reading into the classrooms. Like all "real" readers, the students select their own reading material, read at their own pace, and talk to others about what they've read. Their teacher values the idea that children learn reading by spending time reading, listening to others, and talking with others. Rose calls it reader's club.
In first grade I tried to have them read and then they gave compliments. Like they had looked at the pictures carefully and letters carefully, they had read the whole sentence without stopping, things like that. In second grade we have a list of questions that correlate to the reading, which makes for good dialogue between the children in the group. None of the questions on our list can be answered with a yes or no, it requires the student to give a little information. The students still enjoy giving and receiving compliments to and from their peers.

Such an active teaching/learning climate provides an effective instructional format. In the looping classrooms, students are encouraged to learn with and from each other. Students in both of these classrooms have immense input in their projects and themes and value the opportunity to work based on interest, not ability.

Discussion

This is all great, but can't this happen in traditional single-year classrooms? The answer is yes, but it won't be the same. Children won't have the opportunity to learn and develop at their own rates. A two-year span provides a child with greater continuity in experience, both socially and academically. The opportunities to make personal connections with others and with ideas are especially valuable for emotional and intellectual growth. As any teacher knows, it takes time to assess interests, learning style, and abilities of each student in the classroom. As a result of having the same child for the second year, the teacher already has this information in depth and can immediately act to build on it.

I was amazed during my visits to Rose's classroom on the first day of school and throughout the first week of the 1997-98 school year at the level of intensity
and focus of her second graders. It was evident that relationships had deepened and matured. This kind of group support contributes to problem-solving in the classroom and I even saw it carry over to the playground. I felt that there was a great deal of evaluation, in the most positive sense, that goes on in the second year.

In traditional graded classrooms, most teachers use the majority of their teaching day instructing their students in whole group situations. Reading instruction being the one exception. Traditionally, reading has been taught according to the child's reading ability level. Rose and Pearl demonstrated that they can better meet the many learning levels and needs of their students through teaching with an integrated curriculum approach and flexible student grouping. Instruction in these looping classrooms is a combination of whole group and small group instruction and individual instruction when necessary. The difference between a looping developmentally appropriate whole class lesson and a whole class lesson in a traditional classroom is that in looping classrooms, only content that all students need or can use is taught to the whole class. Any instruction that is skills related and that only certain students need is taught in a temporary small group or individual situation. This difference in grouping for instruction is developmentally appropriate because each student is able to work at his or her individual rate. Such groupings reflect the realities of daily living.

Broad theme studies allow these teachers to use teaching and learning approaches from current best practices for young learners. These include a balanced reading approach to reading in which meaning rather than just phonics or word recognition is central and a discovery approach to science and social studies. Broad thematic studies are not peripheral to the curriculum, but integral. They lend themselves to teaching children of different backgrounds and
ability in one setting. As the knowledge of students accumulate and develop, the work can grow in depth, complexity, and sophistication (Katz & Chard, 1989).
CHAPTER V. FINAL LOOPING REFLECTIONS

Thinking back to when I was looped in first and second grades, I think it helped me be more sure of myself and more comfortable. I loved my teacher; she was so kind. I was a very shy child. I think looping really helped me. Back then they probably looped to save money, and now we are doing it to save children. We need to give them more stability, and looping is one way to do that. I know what they had last year and what to build upon. I also know them better as individuals. You feel more connected, more invested, as a class. (Rose)

For years we have been listening to teachers bewail the fact that they needed just a little more time with certain students. They ran out of time just when they were ready to make a major breakthrough. In the traditional nine-month classroom, the teacher spends the first two months assessing each child's academic, emotional, and social needs. It is not until the year is well under way that the teacher has a clear picture of the child and his or her interests, strengths, and areas of needs. Unfortunately, just as the teacher becomes familiar with the student as a learner, it is almost time for the child to begin the cycle again with a new teacher.

What I have attempted to illustrate in this dissertation is how looping provides a unique approach to elementary education that may provide a remedy for some of the many problems teachers face in traditional classrooms. While I am not arguing that looping is the answer to all instructional and pedagogical problems teachers encounter, what I do assert is that looping offers a structural and pedagogical context in which good teaching is enhanced. To conclude therefore, I would like to summarize what I learned in my research about the ways in which looping enhances good teaching.
First, looping enhances good teaching because it allows teachers a powerful opportunity to really get to know students. Getting to know students really well increases a teacher's commitment to them, as Rose explains:

You are very committed to helping those children succeed, very committed. I am not saying other teachers wouldn't be committed because they are, but it is different when you have the opportunity to have a child for two years. You know how your teaching effects how they are going to learn, you know what strategies work for what kids, and which ones don't work. You can read the body signs of frustration quicker with children you already know.

Further, knowing students well enhances good teaching because the knowledge can be used to make decisions about specialized teaching strategies that address individual needs, interests, and abilities. Teaching is also enhanced because teachers and students foster a mutual understanding of each other's expectations. Finally, knowing a student well often means knowing a parent or parents well, which creates a more family-centered learning climate. A family-centered learning climate produces and thrives on maintaining successful individual and group learning, positive social skill development, individual and group responsibility, and development of life-long learners.

Second, the second year of the looping cycle is more valuable because a teacher starts the year off running. Rose expressed to me how the second school year started off so much more positively for her because of looping. Her description richly summarizes how her second year with her class enhanced her teaching in various ways:

First of all, it was much easier to get into the routine. I didn't have to explain everything all over again. They knew what to expect, and they
were genuinely happy to see each other and happy to see me, I think. I was happy to see them and how they had grown and changed over the summer. I know what I taught them last year and what each of them is capable of, and I can always refer back to that. Or I can say, "I know this is going to be a little hard because you haven't had it before." They know each other, and they don't have to worry about striking up new friendships again. They feel comfortable with who they are with. I do have three new students, and actually I think being placed into this looping classroom was easier for them than if they had been placed in a traditional second grade.

Third, with an additional year with the same teacher, instruction can be better tailored to meet the needs of each student. Curriculum planning is focused on long-term goals that transcend one year. Content instruction begins not with district texts but with Rose's and Pearl's understanding what the students knew about the planned curriculum. Rose and Pearl designed and sequenced content based on students' needs and interests in a pedagogy connecting students to one another in order to build relationships and increase understanding. They planned lessons flexibly in order to cue into students' spontaneous questions, to respond to students' needs (Westerman, 1991). Rose and Pearl plan meaningful curriculums which they create to connect students to both a personal, and a broader world understanding, this enhances their work as teachers.

Fourth, looping fosters collaboration and support among looping teachers. Cousins, Ross, and Maynes (1994) found that teachers who collaborated like Rose and Pearl did, were able to develop more accurate and well-rounded knowledge of students in their classes. Rose and Pearl allowed us to see that collaboration is
not a neat and efficient process. It takes extra time, dedication, and effort on behalf of teachers, but they nonetheless felt strongly that it enhanced their teaching.

Finally, looping allows many teachers to practice a pedagogy that is more aligned with their beliefs than traditional single year classrooms allow. Rose's and Pearl's beliefs and values have developed from over twenty years of elementary classroom teaching experience. The teacher's role in these looping classrooms was that of a facilitator of learning. As facilitators of learning, Rose and Pearl guide students according to individual developmental needs and interests. They no longer believe in the "one-size-fits-all" curriculum and not having to submit to such practices may be what enhanced their teaching the most.

I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity for Rose and Pearl to share anecdotes about their teaching and life experiences with me. These tellings have made me a more reflective teacher and what I have learned from them will enhance my work as a teacher, curriculum planner, and researcher.

Recommendations for Implementing Looping

Nearly every other dimension of restructuring, including empowerment, teamwork, site-based decision making, and providing more flexible alternatives for students, changes the dynamics of school practice in ways that make a looping approach not only more meaningful, but more attainable. Prior to 1996, Rose and Pearl had come to suspect that their classroom structure did not accommodate changes in their thinking about teaching and learning. They wondered how they could create more child-centered classrooms in which a wide range of talents and abilities would be at home. They questioned whether the
yearly trade-off of students was serving the best interest of students, parents, and teachers.

The impact of looping classrooms is evident from the data collected in these two classrooms. I found that Rose and Pearl, as looping teachers, considered the needs of their students holistically and planned for a wider range of abilities and skill levels, thus enhancing their teaching. Although few teachers fail to adapt instruction to the varying levels of ability and skill within their classrooms, traditional single-year teachers are more likely to view these adaptations as deviations from the norm.

Teachers and school districts considering implementing the practice of looping need to consider several things. Looping classrooms allow teachers to practice a variety of instructional strategies which will accommodate the different learning styles and developmental levels of each student in their classrooms. Teachers will need planning time to study grade level expectations; develop thematic units built around curricular objectives; and develop assessments for reading, writing, and mathematics. Attendance at workshops on teaching strategies, multi-age, and looping is essential.

Looping allows teachers and administrators to move into a change that produces a minimum of fear, anxiety, and frustration, not only for students, but also for parents and themselves. This change requires no major school restructuring. The implementation requires teachers to take a risk, boosts teachers' confidence, and opens the door for future multi-age teaching situations.

While many experts believe that the potential advantages of looping outweigh the potential disadvantages, all agree that parents and teachers who are concerned about the downside of looping are worried primarily about the possibility of a bad match between teacher and students or among individual
students and groups of students. Hanson (1995) advises that teachers need to be extra sensitive to new students who join the looped classroom in the second year of the looping cycle. Hanson (1995) also states as a concern the separation period at the end of the two year cycle, which is difficult for both teachers and students.

One of the first steps to take is to administer an informal inventory of your staff's basic beliefs and intuitions about the ways students learn. If too many teachers are uncomfortable with the philosophy and practices associated with looping, there is little point in continuing. Teachers need to have the time to immerse themselves into the literature in order to acquire a sound knowledge base about the practice of looping. Such immersion could include the asking of questions about such matters as pupil grouping, team teaching, evaluating pupil progress, dealing with the community, and adopting necessary policies. It takes time to launch an effective looping program. Time needs to be allotted to work out policies and procedures, to make curriculum changes, to prepare the community, and to provide adequate training and staff development.

The possibilities and the flexibility of looping programs are vast, and the opportunities for children to become successful, lifelong learners are greater than ever before. "My teacher" is an important person in a young child's life. For many children today, their teacher is often the most stable, predictable adult in their lives. In traditional single-grade classrooms it takes time to establish routines. When the teacher is the same person for two years through looping, there is a stability upon which the child and teacher can build.
APPENDIX A:
YEAR LONG PROJECTS THEME WEB

Integrated Thematic Units for Projects Planning

1st Quarter
ME

2nd Quarter
PEOPLE

3rd Quarter
COMMUNITY

4th Quarter
Environment

Main Theme
CONNECTIONS
APPENDIX B:
1ST QUARTER PROJECTS WEB

Brainstorming 1st Quarter Projects

**Feelings**
1. teamwork
   *possible read alouds:
   If I Were in Charge of the World
   Best Friends
   Ira Sleeps Over
   My Friend Jacob
   The Relatives Came
   The Luckiest One of All
   Teacher from the Black Lagoon
   The Terrible Thing That Happened at our House

**Health**
1. dental-video, stuff from local dentist
2. systems-brain, Mr. Ford
   skeletal - Teeny Tunes
3. Germs - Video
   discuss hand washing
4. Food Groups
   eating healthy
5. Exercise
6. First aid know how
   *read alouds
   The Giant Jam Sandwich
   Gregory the Terrible Eater
   Chicken Soup with Rice
   Dr. Desoto
   Stone Soup
   The Popcorn Book
   Magic School Bus books and videos

**Senses**
handicaps
*read alouds
library books on disabilities
specialists talk about glasses, braille, etc.

**Safety**
at different places, home, school, mall, sports
why rules important
have someone come speak about bike safety

**Me**
APPENDIX C:
2ND QUARTER PROJECTS WEB

Brainstorming 2nd Quarter Projects

- **Cultures**
  - family trees
  - celebrations
  - traditions
  - "read alouds"
  - Amazing Grace
  - Legend of the Indian Paintbrush
  - Nine Days to Christmas
  - Anne and the Old One
  - Cuandros de Familia
  - Tar Beach
  - I Hate English

- **Family**
  - bring in pictures of families
  - locate where grandparents live
  - responsibilities
  - last name origination
  - "read alouds"
  - All Kinds of Families
  - People
  - Family Pictures
  - How My Parents Learned to Eat
  - Weird Parents
  - Aunt Flossie's Hats and Crab Cakes Later

- **People**
  - heroes
  - leaders
  - community people read to kids
  - -mayor
  - -principal
  - -High School Leaders
  - write to famous people
  - "read alouds"
  - biographies

- **Friends**
  - what makes a good friend
  - looping class- 2 years
  - giving compliments
  - community building neighborhoods
  - "Read alouds"
  - Love You Forever
  - Amelia Bedelia
  - I Have a Friend
  - Now One Foot, Now the Other
APPENDIX D:  
3RD QUARTER PROJECTS WEB

Brainstorming 3rd Quarter Projects

- **Neighborhoods**
  - beginning mapping
  - school communities
  - community events
  - local area cities, towns
  - "read alouds"
  - Sesame Street Video
  - Hey AI
  - Madeline books
  - The Giving Tree
  - The Most Beautiful Place in the World
  - Night on Neighborhood Street

- **World**
  - foods
  - clothes
  - Where items are made, check tags
  - cultural
  - continents
  - make balloon globes
  - see if any child has been out of country or possibly guest parent
  - e-mail classes in other countries
  - "read alouds"
  - check library for books

- **State**
  - know surrounding states
  - geography
  - farms
  - start plant for next unit, possibly state flower
  - major cities
  - where students born
  - "read alouds"
  - nonfiction books, facts
  - state authors

- **United States**
  - regions
  - state parks
  - oceans
  - rocks, soil
  - regional maps
  - landforms
  - use clay on cardboard
  - "read alouds"
  - nonfiction
  - videos describing states
  - vacation literature

Community
APPENDIX E:
4TH QUARTER PROJECTS WEB

Brainstorming
4th Quarter
Projects

Living Things
- plants
- animal groups
- insects
- Earth Day
- make recycled paper
- 'read aloud'
- Miss Rumphius
- Earth books

Environment

Nonliving Things
- rocks/fossils
- weather
- space
- machines
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