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A Reflective Study Investigating Looping in Higher Education as a Pedagogical Methodology Model

Melissa Comer

Department of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education, Tennessee Technological University, Tennessee
mcomer@tntech.edu

ABSTRACT

Looping, an educational pedagogical approach in which student groups are taught by the same teacher in successive years, has long been implemented in K-12 schools to various degrees of success. However, little research of its occurrence in higher education settings exists. To address the lack of professional scholarship of looping in colleges and universities, this reflective study examines looping as a pedagogical methodology in teacher education courses at the undergraduate level. Having emerged from several years of the author's personal looping implementation at both middle school and collegiate levels, this reflective research study seeks to examine how looping in higher education differs from more traditional course delivery models. Grounded in the ecological framework of reflection and reflective methodology, the study looks at looping and proposes ideas for further areas of investigation.

Keywords: looping, reflective analysis, pedagogical methodology

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1. Introduction

Several years ago, as a middle school English teacher in the United States, I was tasked with meeting President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal mandates which stated, in part, that ALL students would reach academic proficiency, regardless of any perceived disadvantages (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Questioning the enormity of the task, I, along with a few colleagues, engaged in critical and intentional reflection about what we were doing from both a pedagogical and methodological view. Recognizing there was room for improvement in various educational facets and unsure where to start, we stumbled upon the concept of looping, i.e., student groups taught by the same teacher in consecutive years (Hill & Jones, 2018). Determined to find a way to meet the NCLB directives and embracing looping as an innovative, no-cost intervention strategy, a few of us put the practice into place.

In my second year with the same group, because I knew where the class, as a whole and individually, stood academically, there was no need for extensive pre-assessment for placement purposes. Likewise, I was well-versed in students' background knowledge on specific topics within the discipline, their reading attitudes, and interests, as well as student dynamics for cooperative group placements. With looping, I found there was no need for an extensive review of classroom management, grading practices, and similar things. As such, my students and I were able to transition straight into covering content. At the end of the year, student test scores were phenomenal, with each student achieving academic proficiency, including those with achievement gaps. With these results, NCLB's directive was no longer out of reach. My students (and, in essence, I) had met the challenge, and I was sold on the concept of looping as a proven educational pedagogical methodology model.

Although I continued the practice of looping for several years, I reluctantly said goodbye to it when I began teaching at the university level. The traditional delivery modes in higher education dictate that most students take their courses individually rather than with a group. As such, it does not lend itself to the practice of looping. Even when courses build on each other, it is rare that they are taught by the same faculty member, making looping at the collegiate level difficult at best. Even so, intimately aware of looping's success rate as a pedagogical methodology, I yearned to have the ability to put it into practice once again.

Fast forward a few years, my university implemented an elementary education program delivered at off-campus locations in partnerships with local community colleges that is cohort based, i.e., groups of students and faculty that interact mostly with each other (Robles, 2020). After students complete general education requirements in the customary sense at the community college level, they come together as a group to take their teacher education courses with select faculty from the university, never leaving the community college campuses. Each cohort, recognized as teacher candidates, remains together throughout their junior and part of their senior years. Delivered in a block format, teacher candidates take a content block (math, science, social studies) and a literacy block targeting foundational literacy, literacy for upper elementary, and literacy for English language learners. Additionally, in their senior year teacher candidates are required to take a capstone course and a student engagement class before beginning separate residency placements, i.e., co-teaching experience with mentoring teachers. Looping, with this design model, is not only feasible but also a natural fit.

As a literacy professor, I begin with a cohort in the second semester of their junior year providing instruction in several literacy principles and practices, including differentiated instruction for English language learners. Throughout this semester, the multiple courses the teacher candidates take with me allow us to get to know each other very well. We spend time invested in discussing literacy content and uncovering what it means to be part of a learning community, or, as Gablenick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990) assert, a curricular restructure that provides students "opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning experience" (p. 19). Reminiscent of my days as a middle school educator, I follow each cohort into their senior year where I teach the capstone and student engagement courses. It is at this juncture where the differences between looping and more traditional course delivery models become evident, informing the purpose and research questions for this study.

1.1. Purpose of study and research question(s)

Building on Fook's notion that "research should arise from personal experience, since the researcher will certainly have the motivation and openness to appreciate the experiences being studied" (1999, p. 15), this reflective research study emerged from several years of personal looping implementation at both middle school and collegiate levels. The following questions anchor this study:

- How does looping in higher education differ from more traditional course delivery models?
- How does the researcher's experiences with looping at the university level inform professional literature for looping as a pedagogical methodology in higher education?

2. Literature review

2.1. Looping: A brief background

Looping, coined in 1997 by Jim Grant, dates to the one-room schoolhouse in the United States where the teacher taught the same group of students for multiple years. Interestingly, the one-room schoolhouse looping practice, according to Simel (1998) was one of necessity not choice and is not considered a historical precedent. Instead, Simel points to countries like Germany and the Waldorf Schools as influences for current looping practices with some noted differences. German schools implement looping that begin with heterogeneous groups in first grade, remaining together for the next four years (Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). Waldorf Schools, founded by Rudolf Steiner just after World War I in Stuttgart, Germany, keep the teacher and student groups together for grades first through eighth (Little & Little, 2001). Recent practice of looping in the United States centers on a two-year looping model first implemented by Meir in 1974 (Goldberg, 1990). It is this model I am most familiar with. Irrespective of the number of years, the basic premise of looping is that the teacher and students build relationships which allows the teacher to discover students' academic abilities, building on knowledge of the previous year(s) (Grant et al., 2000). Regardless of the model employed, research reveals both advantages and disadvantages of looping.

2.2. Looping advantages

Research at the elementary, middle, and high school levels supports the notion that there are clear advantages to looping, beginning with increased instructional time which has potential to lead to improved student achievement (Burk, 1996; Grant et al., 1996; & Hanson, 1995). More recently, research shows that looping can increase test scores with the largest gains found among minorities (Hill & Jones, 2018; Franz et al., 2010; Cistone et al., 2004; Bogart, 2002). Other advantages cited are increased student attendance and promotion (Cistone et al., 2004), increased trust in relationships with students (Bafile, 2009), improved relationships among students and between teachers and students, leading to more efficient instruction, fewer referrals of students to special education programs, and improved student discipline (Grant, 2017). Beyond this, Grant also found that staff attendance improved from an average of seven days missed in non-looping classrooms to an average of three days absent in the looping classrooms.

Supporting the advantages discussed above is Wedenoja, Papay, and Kraft's (2022) findings that students' test scores in looping classrooms increase across all grade levels. Their research also maintains that "repeat interactions decrease disciplinary infractions for students across grade levels and improve attendance in high school by reducing truancy" (p. 3) leading them to propose that teachers are more successful working with students in the looped year. Most interestingly, perhaps, is that, according to Wedonja et al. (2022), "positive test score gains are most pronounced among higher-performing and white female students, while gains in attendance and discipline are largest for lower-performing students and male students of color" (p. 3). Recognizing that relationships play a central role in the education process, Wedonja et al. (2022) conclude that "Repeat students and teachers have more time to get to know each other's teaching styles and learning needs, as well as to develop stronger, more trusting relationships" (p. 21) and "with intentional loops, teachers can realize other benefits, such as adjusting the content of classes over two years in order to maximize learning" (p. 22). Even though the advantages cited certainly support the looping model, disadvantages do exist.

2.3. Looping disadvantages

Childers (2020) reports that implementation of looping can be challenging because it requires involvement of more than one teacher. For example, if a second-grade teacher loops to third grade then a first- grade teacher must loop to second grade. Another drawback, Childers continues, is that students experience class with one teacher only, becoming familiar with their classroom culture, idiosyncrasies, and methods, making transitioning to another teacher at the conclusion of the looping cycle difficult. Childers concludes with the disadvantage that curriculum must advance with the students. If you loop for three years, for example, each year you must teach a different and new curriculum, which ultimately means more planning and deepened knowledge of pedagogy, methodology, and content for various grade levels and age groups. To investigate looping in higher education (including its advantages and disadvantages) through a critical lens, I situated this current research project as a reflective study.

3. Theoretical framework

Adopting Harvey's, Coulson's, and McMaugh's (2016) view on reflection, I readily acknowledge that reflection can serve "as both an assessment strategy and a mechanism for understanding and learning from potentially transformative learning experiences" (p. 1). Having used reflection to assess student work and my own teaching, this study focuses on the latter purpose of reflection, i.e., mechanism for understanding and learning. To that end, like Harvey, et al., I too find that there is little theoretical evidence supporting the integration of reflective practice with learning outcomes. Using Harvey's et al. proposed ecological framework of reflection, I positioned this study within their empirical evidence supporting reflection. Specifically, I was guided by their notion that reflection supports learning, is a process, and "may be engaged with at different levels for different purposes and from different perspectives" (p. 6). Like Harvey et al. (2016), I adopted the stance that by "drawing on multiple perspectives the reflective practitioner [is provided] with a holistic or ecological understanding of the issue under reflection and is analogous to the triangulation of data in the research process" (p. 6) and that reflection involves many ways of knowing. Throughout this study, I adhered to the various pieces of empirical evidence the authors presented, using reflection to look at multiple facets of looping as a pedagogical methodology, specifically that of praxis.

Harvey et al. (2016) state that "reflective practice is an effective strategy in bridging the learning of theory with its authentic application beyond the classroom, achieving praxis" and that "Praxis refers to the synergetic nexus between theory and practice" (p. 9). It is this connection between theory and practice that I find most intriguing. Rather than separating the two, reflection allowed me to be intentional with the exploration of how practice is influenced by theory and vice versa. In essence, the research permitted me the opportunity to view theory and practice through the lens of "thought and action" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 16).

4. Methodology & data collection

Grounded in a reflective study methodology, this research began with the acceptance that reflective methodology, as Goodrick (2014) posits, "involves the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal" (p. 1). Extending this, reflective methodology permitted me to examine how looping as an educational practice differs from the more traditional approach found in the college classroom. Another critical facet to the methodology approach is that reflective study in this instance presents an opportunity to provide missing or new information concerning looping as a pedagogical methodology in higher education.

As with any research study, data collection is crucial for success. Throughout this study, I was guided by Silverman and Marvasti's (2008) belief that data for reflective studies should look at what people do, say, produce, or write. With this guiding principle, I collected the following data, with the understanding that it is important to use multiple sources to permit a triangulation of data: 1) course syllabi, 2) course websites, 3) course completion percentages, 4) course written affirmations, and 5) course observations. For this study, I collected and analyzed a total of four syllabi, coding each syllabus according to when teacher candidates took the courses, e.g., Course Aa(S)=1st course taken, semester 1; Course Ab(S)=2nd course taken, semester 1; Course Ba(S)=1st course taken, looped semester; Course Bb(S)=2nd course taken, looped semester; to determine the degree, if any, they varied. Data collection also consisted of four course websites. As indicated in Table 1, I coded each course website in a similar manner to that of the syllabi. I next compared teacher candidates' percentages of completion at the end of semester one to the end of the looped semester (semester 2) for each of the two semesters to establish if there was a difference in retention. Within Course Bb (course 2, looped semester) as an in-class project, I collected data in the form of course written affirmations, or brief, anonymous notes to provide candidates with a platform for expressing their views or opinions without fear of consequence or judgement. I then employed open coding, allowing themes and subthemes to emerge (see Table 2 for details). As a final key data source, I conducted informal observations for the purpose of reflection throughout semester 1 and semester 2, the looped semester, looking primarily to see how, if, student performance and/or behavior changed. Concerning the observational data, though informal, it was based loosely on the three domains outlined in Pianta, LaParo, and Hamre's (2007) Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) standardized observation model, i.e., emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (see Table 3 for additional information). As such, the data permitted reflection on students', i.e., teacher candidates', social, development, and academic achievement over the two semesters.

Table 1.
Data Codes for Syllabi/Websites

Course Syllabus	**Course Website**
Aa(S) = Course 1, Semester 1	Aa(W) Course 1, Semester 1
Ab(S) = Course 2, Semester 1	Ab(W) = Course 2, Semester 1
Ba(S) = Course 1, Semester 2	Ba(W) = Course 1, Semester 2
Bb(S) = Course 2, Semester 2	*Bb(W) = Course 2, Semester 2*

Table 2.
Data Codes for Course Written Affirmation

Theme 1	**Theme 2**
Personal Notes	Professional Notes
Subthemes	**Subthemes**
Personality traits	Learning
Spiritual traits	Knowledge
Physical traits	Application

Table 3.
CLASS Domains & Dimensions

Emotional Support	**Classroom Organization**	**Instructional Support**
Positive Climate	Behavior Management	Content Understanding
Negative Climate	Productivity Instructional	Analysis and Problem-Solving
Teacher Sensitivity	Learning Formats	Quality of Feedback
Regard for Student (Adolescent) Perspectives		Instructional Dialogue

4.1. Reliability & validity

Concerning reliability in a reflective self-study, inter-rater reliability is not applicable. Supporting this notion, Noble and Smith (2015) reminds us that tests used to ascertain the validity and reliability of quantitative research cannot be applied to qualitative research, the umbrella term under which this study falls. Even so, the need to gauge consistency, or rigor, exists. It should be noted that throughout a qualitative study such as this, inquiry steps are repeated multiple times during the process with continuous reassessment and reiteration (Cypress, 2017). Beyond this, another way, per Cypress, to ensure rigor, thus reliability and validity, data collection should involve multiple sources, as is the case for this reflective self-study. The various data pieces, outlined in the Methodology and Data Collection section above, support this stance and offer a way to triangulate the data, helping to ensure validity. See Figure 1 for additional information.

To monitor the quality of the data collected, I analyzed and recorded evidence and then distanced myself from the results. Building time into the research process to step away from the data in order to revisit it in the future served as an opportunity to, in essence, replicate the analysis and compare initial and latter perspectives. Returning to the data after a time lapse of approximately 5 months enabled me to examine any personal biases which may have influenced results. Additionally, by maintaining careful record-keeping from both the initial and follow-up analysis, I was able to compare the data of the "two" perspectives. Doing so, provided a way to apply rigor and determine that the initial investigation was not only reliable but also valid.

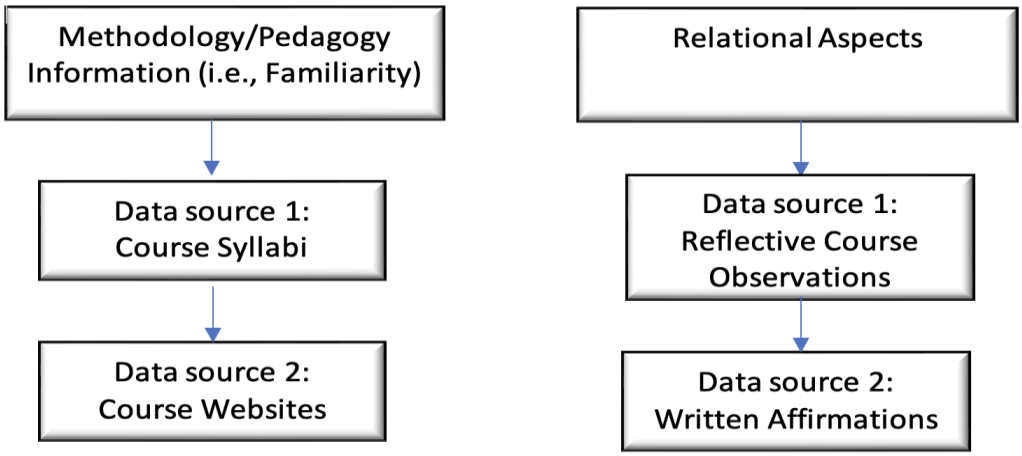

Figure 1. Data Triangulation

5. Results & analysis

Stemming from the study's nexus on reflection, I engaged in reflective analysis to process the data collected. Specifically, I approached the research from a practitioner's view, connecting the results to their practical uses while reflecting on the concept of looping as a pedagogical methodology. As such, the ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretative, and Decisional) method, developed by Spencer (1989) and discussed below, served to structure this research.

5.1. Objective

The objective component of ORID, per Spencer, provides the context for the study, establishing if you will, the purpose of the research. To that end, the objective of this reflective self-study sought to answer the following questions:

- How does looping in higher education differ from more traditional course delivery models?
- How does the researcher's experiences with looping at the university level inform professional literature for looping as a pedagogical methodology in higher education?

Throughout the study, I kept these questions in mind and used them as a guide. Addressing the first question, I drew from personal experiences with both looping and traditional course delivery models and confirmed that each model shares similarities in purpose (delivering content), but differences abound in the relational aspect. Additionally, I found that there was little professional literature that addresses looping in higher education. Like Hooks and Corbett (2005), searches for looping in higher education on various databases (ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts, Research Gate, Google Scholar) yielded one result that focused on higher education: Hooks and Corbett's study. Their study examined looping from the perspective of a librarian who followed graduate cohorts throughout a two-year cycle, serving as the common element. As such, my study contributes information about looping from a professor's viewpoint and provides insight about how it may be used as a pedagogical methodology.

5.2. Reflective

Turning to the reflective aspect of ORID, Spencer (1989) references the need to think of reflection as a learning journey in relation to the topic. To accomplish the task of reflecting on looping as a pedagogical methodology, I used course observations, based loosely on the domains outlined in the CLASS (Pianta et al, 2007) observation instrument, as a data source which revealed numerous, insightful things about the students, myself, and the methodological aspect of teaching. One, alluding to the Emotional Support domain of CLASS, my relationships with students are stronger in looped courses than in more traditional ones. As a professor, during the looped semester I am afforded deeper insight into who teacher candidates are as people, not just as students. I hear about their lives outside the classroom, learning what motivates them, their likes, and dislikes, who their significant others are. I also gain firsthand knowledge about their fears concerning their chosen profession, i.e., teaching, and goals they have for the future. These things support the climate, teacher sensitivity, and student perspectives dimensions outlined in CLASS. Two, related to the Classroom Organization (CO) domain of CLASS, looping permits an insight into personality dynamics which aides in forming cooperative groups and creating challenging, achievable course activities. Beyond this, applying Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978) is easier in the looped semester (much more so than in a traditional semester) because I recognize their strengths as well as growth areas from both cognitive and emotional standpoints. Additionally, behavior management (a dimension in the CO domain) in the looped semester is easier because of the familiarity between teacher candidates and me.

Reflection also reveals that I am a different professor during the looped semester than the initial, traditional one. I know better how to gauge content understanding (a dimension of the Instructional Support Domain in CLASS) and determine what pedagogy and methodological aspects benefit the teacher candidates the most. For example, course observation reflections from semester one (traditional semester) show that students benefit from interactive lectures, something I know to integrate into the looped semester (semester 2) at the onset. During the looped semester, teacher candidates are more willing to engage in instructional dialogue (another dimension of the Instructional Support domain) which informs methodological practices such as scaffolding and recursive learning. By semester two, I am comfortable with students as people and permit them an insight into who I am as a person, not just as an academic. I share my life with them in much the same way they do. They become familiar with

my interests outside my job; for example, they know which football team holds my allegiance and that I have an irrational fear of birds (all birds). These things, though not academic in nature, play a critical role in pedagogy as they support relationship building and reinforce CLASS's Emotional Support domain. Finally, reflection on my involvement with looping permits me to say that I prefer it over the more traditional approach. I find that the professional and somewhat personal relationships I form with teacher candidates as well as the ones they develop with each other, builds mutual respect, producing a more inclusive learning environment that encourages not only content understanding but also analysis and problem-solving, both dimensions of the Instructional Support domain in the CLASS observation model. Beyond this, supported by Xintong Li, Bergin, and Olsen's research (2022), I readily accept that I engage in higher-quality instructional methodology because of the positive, more fully developed relationships with students in the looped semester. More importantly, perhaps, is that these relationships serve as a building block for ones the students will need to develop when they become educators themselves.

5.3. Interpretative

The Interpretative step within Spencer's (1989) ORID method is viewed as the part of the analysis where one interprets what is learned from the experience. The data collection set outlined previously provided ample information to allow examination of key takeaways. By looking at the syllabi for each of the four courses, specifically at how I review those with the teaching candidates within the courses reveal several things. First, characteristic of pedagogical approaches in the traditional delivery model, I discuss, in-depth, syllabi Aa and Ab (semester one), highlighting things like my late-assignment and grading policies in detail. I also ensure students know exactly where my office is located and the best method for contacting me as well as where I stand on absences and tardiness. Reflecting on my treatment of syllabi in the looped year, syllabi Ba and Bb, shows that while these things are still included on each syllabus I reference them in a cursory manner only, going so far as to tell students they can view them at their leisure. Rather than spending time reviewing each page of the syllabus for courses Ba and Bb, I often pass them out (or share them electronically) with the directive "let me know if you have any questions" and move straight into content delivery on day one, much like I was able to do with the middle school classes I looped with.

Moving toward triangulation of data (see Figure 1), the second piece of data I collected, course websites, resulted in additional confirmation that there was no need to spend time reviewing website design and general information in the looped semester. Because I use similar (if not the same) design format both semesters, students know how I set up each website. They are familiar with where to locate content, assignment descriptions, announcements, and other pertinent information. Their degree of familiarity allows me to focus less on the technological aspect of the tools I use to house or deliver information, making the course more content driven than those offered in the more traditional semester one.

As a data source, in full transparency, I found that course completion percentages provided little insight into my reflective study. Throughout my tenure in the cohort delivery model favored by my university's elementary education program, it is rare that students fail to complete the program of study. Still, if students do withdraw it occurs after semester one. Though strong in both semesters, completion percentages are a fraction higher in the looped semester with a 100% retention rate.

One of the more enlightening data sources from an interpretive viewpoint is that of the course written affirmations. Designed to gain insight into the structure of the courses, looping, pedagogy, methodology, and my own instruction, I ask teacher candidates to write anonymous

post-it notes sharing their perceptions. As referenced previously, the anonymity of the notes provides a platform for open and critical feedback free from repercussions. It should also be noted that I collect the written affirmations during the last week of semester two to ensure ample participation in looping as an educational practice has occurred. Upon collection, I reflect on what students share in a critical manner and categorize the notes by common themes to get a better feel for the data in relation to the research questions, conducting, in essence, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Braun and Clark's six-step analysis guide, I first become familiar with the data (step 1), reading through it multiple times. Next, I generate initial codes (step 2), then search for themes (step 3), review themes (step 4), define themes, and write-up (step 5) the analysis. Much like Elliott (2018) I adopt the stance that "coding is a decision-making process where the decisions must be made in the context of a particular piece of research" (p. 2850). To allow the codes to develop from the research, I use open coding, allowing me to create and adapt codes as I work with the data rather than having any pre-set codes in place.

The affirmation data set falls into two primary themes, i.e., codes: personal notes and professional ones with several sub-themes (detailed in Table 2). On the personal spectrum, much of the feedback, at least on the surface, seemingly has little to do with looping as an educational practice. Candidates comment on my sense of style. For example, "I love all of your clothes," and "I hope I look as good as you as I age" (a backhanded compliment?). They have also characterized me as "extremely sweet," "assertive," "free spirit," "tough," and having a "quiet faith, allowing it show in your actions rather than words." While it is true that these types of comments appear to be superficial in connection to the research topic, they do speak volumes about the relational aspect that is encouraged and strengthened by looping.

The other data set of written affirmations are more professional, pertaining to pedagogy, methodology, looping, or learning in general. In this respect, the sub-themes that emerged pertained to learning, knowledge, and application. One anonymous person shared,

> "Having multiple courses with you over the last two semesters are some of the only classes where I have learned so much. I barely had to study for the Praxis test [i.e., national teacher certification exam] because I already know so much. Thank you!"

Another person shared that "I have learned, over the last two semesters, how important it is to be prepared and be willing to adapt when necessary." Both comments speak to knowledge takeaways and sound pedagogy, however, the following feedback best summarizes what I hope students take from their experiences with looping and cohorts:

> "Throughout the last couple of semesters, looping with you and the cohort, I have learned that I need to be an advocate for better education. I need to challenge my future students so they can be the best they can be. You have shown me that anything is possible if I work hard enough. I have also learned to embrace my culture and just how special it is. These are lessons about teaching that I will take into my own classroom."

5.4. Decisional

The final component of the ORID model is decisional. At this juncture, according to Spencer (1989), analysis asks the researcher to explore the "now what" part of the research, meaning one seeks to determine how the research impacts future decisions or plans. One way I approach the decisional component is through application, centering on the following questions: How will I apply what I uncover through research in a concrete, intentional manner? As a data source, the reflective course observations conducted with this study (and drawn from throughout the analysis), have aided me in making the following decisions:

- Continue looping and seek out opportunities to implement it on a larger scale than currently doing. Additionally, I plan on continuing my research from a reflective study viewpoint, collecting more data, especially reflective observational data.
- Investigate looping at the collegiate level in a quantitative manner. While I value reflective study, I do see the need for quantitative data. One area of future exploration I would like to investigate is the impact, if any, looping has on certification exam scores. Teacher candidates within the program of study I teach are required to take several Praxis exams (certification exams). I am curious to see how their results compare to counterparts in more traditional programs. Within this realm, they also complete edTPA, a performance-based, subject-specific assessment to "emphasize, measure, and support the skills and knowledge that all teachers need" (About edTPA, para. 3). The built-in support system looping, and the cohort model afford, potentially impacts edTPA scores positively. Quantitative data would prove or disprove this assumption.
- Explore looping's two strands of advantages - those for students and those for teachers/educators – more fully, from both a reflective study and quantitative lens. While they are interrelated, I am curious to see how their interdependence influences one another. Adhering to a social interdependence theory (Johnson and Johnson, 2009) framework, in this instance, would allow me to determine to what degree the two types of social interdependences, positive (the actions to accomplish joint goals) and negative (the actions to hinder joint goals), exist.
- Address the possibility of applying looping universally in higher education. See the section below for an exploration of how one might mitigate the challenges of implementing looping comprehensively.

5.5. Mitigating the challenges of implementing looping in higher education

As detailed in the Literature Review section of this manuscript and summarized in Table 4, challenges, or disadvantages, in looping implementation do exist. Because the program in which I teach is designed to run as a cohort, block scheduled model, there is no need for a colleague to agree to loop, mitigating the disadvantage cited previously. After looping, teacher candidates must get used to their Residency placements which entails them working with mentoring teachers and university supervisors they may not know which, I imagine, produces a definite adjustment period. However, while it is true that my students become well acquainted with my classroom protocols, they are adult learners who can more easily transition into different learning situations than elementary, middle, or high school aged students can, thus lessoning the impact of another referenced disadvantage. My area of expertise is literacy, with emphases in English and teacher education. When I began looping with teacher candidates, I had never taught the capstone or student engagement courses and, in full disclosure, there were times when I became overwhelmed with the various course content I needed to know to teach. Although both courses were challenging due to the new content, I found the challenge to be exhilarating. It moved me outside my comfort zone and allowed me to engage in continuous learning and empathize with students in a way I had not done in a long time, reframing a cited disadvantage into something more positive. Employing these steps allowed for an ideal implementation process, one that could be replicated on a larger, more comprehensive scale.

Postman (1995) reminds us that "schools [i.e., colleges and universities] are not fixed in one position. They can be moved up and down and sideways, so that at different times and in different venues, they will reflect one thing and not another" (p. 51). Accepting looping as an instructive practice is a practical, efficient way to restructure education. Therein, lies the first step in overcoming the challenge of employing looping in higher education: acceptance of looping as a realistic possibility. Doing so requires a willingness to change traditional practice.

It begins with an open-mind and a positive growth-mindset. Along this line, is being open to the restructuring of standard scheduling and course offerings needed to engage in looping. One way to accomplish this, as outlined in Table 4, is to deliver instruction through a cohort, block schedule model (see the Introduction section of this manuscript for information), mitigating the challenge of commitment needed by more than one educator. For example, in my situation the cohort-based, block schedule overrides the need for anyone else to move with students. Because students advance with one another through a prescribed curriculum, they have the same schedule, concluding with the looped semester. Personally, one of the biggest disadvantages I face is interacting with students I find problematic for an extended amount of time. Admitting this challenge is the first step in facing it. Postman (1995) says that knowing that we do not know and cannot know the whole truth, i.e., picture, is how we move toward it, "inch by inch, discarding what we know to be false" (p. 57). That is to say that we work out how to deal with difficult students or general looping challenges as they present themselves. This is true in both traditional and looping course delivery models.

Table 4.
Looping Disadvantage/Challenges & Possible Solutions

Disadvantage/Challenge	**Possible Solution**
Need for involvement of more than one educator	Institute a cohort, block schedule format, decreasing or mitigating the need for an additional instructor to loop.
Lack of variance in classroom culture, i.e., protocols, resulting in transition issues once looping concludes	Prepare students for the transition at the conclusion of the looped semester. Note: Transition issues are not prevalent with adult learners. They are better equipped to adapt than younger learners.
Increased responsibilities due to curriculum advances	Embrace augmented curriculum responsibilities as an opportunity to engage in continuous learning that often results in empathy for students.
Resistance to change	Adopt a willingness to move out of one's comfort zone with a focus on an open-mind and growth-mindset.
Extended interaction with problematic students	Deal with this issue on a case-by-case basis. Need for set classroom management guidelines and practices are paramount.

6. Conclusion

Perhaps the primary takeaway I gained through the process of the research and looping itself is witnessing firsthand the growth of the students who populate my courses. During their first semester they are very much students in their behavior and thought processes. By the conclusion of the looped, second semester, they have developed a professional mindset, transitioning from the role of student or teacher candidate to that of teacher. Without looping, I would never see this play out. As important as the professional aspect is, it is just as significant to include the personal relationships looping helps to make possible. Because I know my students very well, my relationships with them extend beyond their graduation dates; they seek career advice, keep me informed about their successes (and challenges) as educators, and send invitations to their weddings or share birth announcements. The time we have invested with and in each other have made us a family.

Throughout this reflective research project, I sought to explore looping as a pedagogical methodology, which, in its most basic sense, is "a set of procedures teachers can develop to help all students learn" (Teodoro & Mesquita, 2003, p. 4). At my core, I am a teacher intent on developing a set of procedures to ensure learning and develop relationships. Looping is one such procedure. Within the paradigm of pedagogy, looping requires an attitude change, with

an open-mind and willingness to change traditional practice. As reflective research, this self-study is just one person's experiences, detailing positive outcomes as well as how challenges or disadvantages encountered in looping were overcome. It's a beginning point in the conversation.

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