

7-2018

## A Qualitative Study on Teacher Perceptions of Self-Contained and Departmentalized Classrooms at the Elementary Level

Dana R. Wiggins

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COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONTAINED  
AND DEPARTMENTALIZED CLASSROOMS AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING, FOUNDATIONS, AND LEADERSHIP

BY

DANA WIGGINS

2018

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONTAINED  
AND DEPARTMENTALIZED CLASSROOMS AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

By

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July 2018

## ABSTRACT

Classroom organizational structure and the impact on student achievement has been a major concern for decades for elementary teachers and administrators (McGrath & Rust, 2002). At the elementary level, the expectation is teachers are experts in all curriculum areas, and for elementary teachers these areas are English, language arts, writing, science, social studies, and math. Most elementary teachers believe they are generalists and are unable to be experts in every subject area. This concern has significantly influenced school administrators' decisions about best practices and classroom organization to maximize student learning. One way administrators are addressing this problem is by departmentalizing and not having every teacher teach every subject (Carolan, 2013). The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. This study addresses three focus areas: teacher perceptions on departmentalized and self-contained classrooms, advantages and disadvantages of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms, and student achievement. The current study will use a qualitative approach to answer the research questions. Analysis of teacher perceptions in the forms of teacher and administrator questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews will help create a more comprehensive representation of departmentalization and its impact on student achievement as well as the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization. Data collection and analysis will help to make instructional decisions for classroom organization.

Keywords: elementary school teachers, departmentalization, self-contained classrooms, school administration

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my husband, Hayden Wiggins, and my two little boys, Dalton and Harrison Wiggins. I love you more than you will ever know.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to everyone who stood behind me on this journey. I thank God for allowing me the opportunity to complete this task, and all the opportunities given to me over the past few years in my education career.

My committee chair, Dr. Tom Hackett has served as an awesome mentor and has been a constant source of encouragement and guidance. I cannot thank him enough for not letting me quit and for pushing me to complete this dissertation. My committee member Dr. Christopher Garretson, thank you for the constant support and for taking the time to always read through my work and make corrections. My methodologist, Dr. Robert Waller, whose painfully honest feedback was exactly what I needed to complete this dissertation. I will forever be grateful for all the times you drove across the state to meet with me and the intense and extensive discussions we had.

I give a special acknowledgement to the wonderful friends and teammates who I work with, Dr. Cheryl Thomas and Bridgett Snooks. Thank you for all of your support and for always being my support system. Bridgett Snooks, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for all the hours you spent reading and editing my work. It is a pleasure to work with you both every single day. We are an awesome team!

To my CSU team and friends, Kelly Munn, Kelly Rush, Beth Stuerman, Nikki Cooper, Del Martin, Alyson Keenom, Tami Godman, Chris Brown, Brett Wallace, and Tonia Wallace. I truly enjoyed our group and all the things we endured together. Jody Dean and Carmen Horton, I could not have survived without you and I am so glad we found each other when we did. Your dedication is exactly what I needed.

Thank you so much Hayley Smith for assisting me in the data collection and helping guide this study. Your support and encouragement were an integral part of this study and you went out of your way to help me. I will forever be grateful for your friendship.

I am so thankful for my wonderful parents Wayne and Sherry Robinson, who are always so supportive of all my endeavors and encourage me along the way. They instilled in me a very strong work ethic and I can't thank them enough for all their love and support.

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- Data Team Facilitator for K-5th
- SACs Committee
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- RTI support
- Instructional Support
- FTE Coordinator



- Schedule classes for Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade
- Infinite Campus

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The decision to have departmentalized or self-contained classrooms is a difficult decision for any educational leader to make and can definitely be debated (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Administrators need to consider many factors when deciding the best way to organize classrooms at the elementary level. A limited number of empirical studies help to determine the relationship between classroom organizational structures and student achievement (McGrath & Rust, 2002). The literature shows studies connected to elementary school classroom organizations are inconclusive and offer little guidance when determining the impact of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. Each year school leaders analyze data, conduct research, and collectively plan to ensure that they are making the best decision for the organization. There are many positive and negative outcomes to consider when using either classroom structure. Piaget suggested learning should be adapted to meet the developmental needs of the learner, a subject pertinent to the discussion of organizational structure. This discussion should consider which is the most developmentally appropriate structure for elementary students.

Principals and other school leaders must consider which classroom structure best suits the needs of the students in their building before deciding to departmentalize or remain self-contained. After a careful review of the literature, it appears that there are advantages and disadvantages to both structures, and both ways of organizing a classroom are viable options supporting student learning. Not only does the principal need to have data to support the decision to departmentalize or teach in a self-contained

setting, but they also must have teacher buy-in to implement this organizational structure effectively. Administrators must look at these two organizational structures and decide which one best fits their teachers, students, and other support staff.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level with respect to improving student achievement. This study will inform administrators on the critical decision they make concerning classroom structure. This is a case study because it involves exploring teachers' perceptions of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms through interviews with teachers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, elementary school organizational structure has been subject of debate with teachers and administrators (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Guiding this study are the conceptual frameworks of Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and sociocultural theories. The ideologies support the research for the current study and the debate between departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. The researcher selected these theorists' works to connect the significance of the classroom environment on how students acquire their development of information and knowledge. These theoretical frameworks are referenced when exploring how and when students learn best (organizational structure). These two theorists deliberated on the setting where learning takes place, which makes their theories pertinent to the motivation of this research analysis.



Developing socialization and observations are present in writings of Piaget and Vygotsky and are an important part of school structures. Piaget and Vygotsky are renowned theorists in progressive psychology. Vygotsky highlighted the social basis throughout the period of cognitive development; Piaget described the social foundation with equilibrium concept (Hasan, 2017). Vygotsky advocated children interact in their social environment, and through language and acquisition, they can learn. Piaget supported the notion that children actively become socialized and learn to solve problems in certain social environments (Hasan, 2017). Figure 1 represents the relationship between the theoretical frameworks and the research problem.

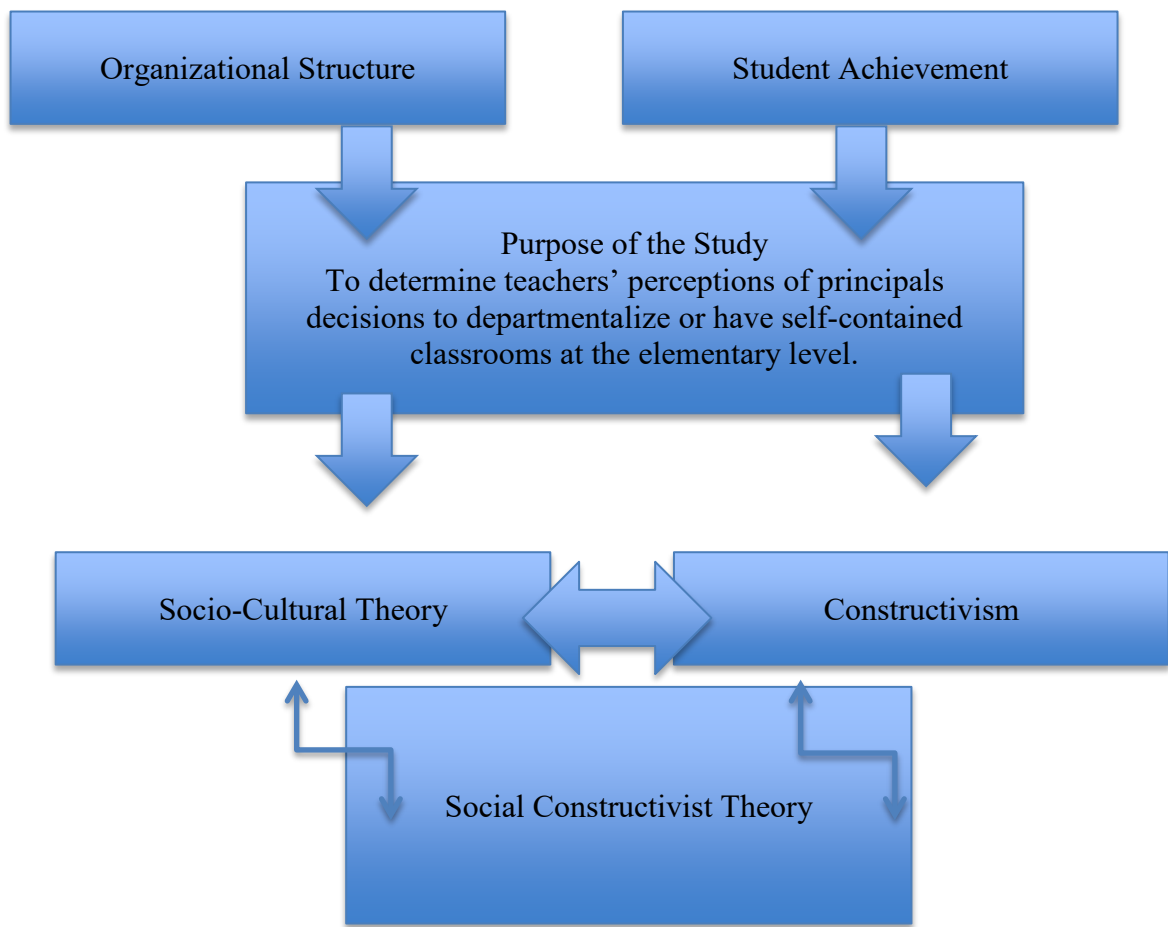


Figure 1. Relationship between theoretical framework and research study. This figure illustrates the connection between Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories and this study.

## **Vygotsky**

Vygotsky (1935) explained children's learning environment and peer interaction provided a positive way to develop skills and strategies. Vygotsky's theory supported the idea that cognitive development deeply relies on the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Children get to this level when they take part in social activities and engage in social behavior. Full growth of the zone of proximal development depends upon full social engagement and interaction. Vygotsky believed children's relationships with the environment were important to developing their own internal processes. Vygotsky's theories directly relate to this research study suggesting students should have different levels of ability and operate within their zone of proximal development in the classroom structure (McLeod, 2012).

## **Piaget**

Piaget (1954) believed children should hypothesize their own meaning to gain understanding. Piaget's theory involves adapting instruction to meet all learners' developmental level (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2001). The teacher's role is to promote learning by providing various experiences. Piaget's theory of cognitive development is of significance in association with the nature-nurture examination. Piaget explained that nature played a tremendous part in understanding how children go through the consistent stages of cognitive development in the same sequence. Piaget also believed a child's environment significantly influences development, hence the importance of finding the best classroom structure to address the individual needs of learners. Piaget suggested children become socialized while growing up, but Vygotsky declared children become individuals while they are growing up (Hasan, 2017). Regardless of which

theorist is correct in this argument, one assertion follows both sides; the environment a child learns in (classroom organizational structure) impacts the child's development.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this particular study is to explore teachers' perceptions on classroom organization and the effects of the models at the elementary level. This study will help to gain understanding of the perceptions teachers have on classroom organizational structure. Little research has explored teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classroom structures. It is common to see a variety of scheduling methods while little research investigates how teachers truly feel. This study was also significant because it provided research and data to school administrators to use when planning their schedules and adapting instruction to meet the needs of teachers and students.

### **Research Design**

The researcher chose a qualitative research design for this study to attempt to get an understanding of teachers' perceptions of organizational structure at the elementary level. Data collection took place with teachers in a natural setting. The researcher employed a survey based on a survey found in a doctoral study entitled *Principals' Perceptions of Self-contained and Departmentalized Classrooms*. The creator of this survey granted permission for the researcher to use the survey for the purpose of this study.

### **Research Questions**

The guiding question for this study is: *What are teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?* The researcher

anticipates gaining insight into how teachers perceive the organizational structures within a school. Using various data collection methods, the researcher will better understand why teachers prefer one classroom structure to another. This data along with the trends and conclusions drawn from it will guide decision-making for classroom structure at the school and system levels within the researcher's school system.

### **Methodology**

The researcher conducted a qualitative research study to investigate the research question. The research design was an interpretive, qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) to help understand the meaning of teachers' perceptions of classroom organizational structures in the teachers' natural setting at the elementary level. Creswell (2009) suggests the natural setting allows researchers to collect the data where the participants are familiar with the issue of interest. In the qualitative study, the researcher typically draws on models, concepts, and theories from diverse branches of sociology or psychology to structure a study (Merriam, 2002).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The goal of this study is to provide adequate and descriptive data to principals and teachers interested in learning how teachers perceived classroom organization and structure and what model they chose over the other. Surveys administered to teachers in Middle Georgia accumulated data for this study. The survey instrument selected for this study was used in a previous study. It is reliable and valid. The study of teacher perceptions on departmentalized and self-contained classrooms was delimited to survey results. The assumption made during this study was that teachers would truthfully

complete the survey and provide an accurate description of how they perceive classroom organization structure.

### **Definition of Terms**

Since there is conflicting vocabulary and terminology in the literature, the following terms will help to improve the reader's understanding of terms used throughout this case study:

*Accuracy:* the ability of an individual to perform a skill correctly.

*Assessment:* the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information.

*CCRPI:* a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders promoting college and career readiness for public school students in Georgia.

*Common Core State Standards:* a set of educational standards designed to ensure students graduating from high school are prepared to enter college programs or the work force (NGA & CCSO, 2010)

*Co-teaching/Team teaching:* involves a general education teacher and a special education teacher who share the responsibility of teaching students with diverse academic needs in a classroom.

*Curriculum:* consists of the content, skills, or topics for teachers to clarify and cover along with the recommended timeline and instructional material.

*Departmentalization:* teachers teach in an area of specialization while students move from one classroom to another for instruction (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Delviscio & Muffs, 2007).

*Elementary school:* refers to the first seven to nine years of formal education

*Primary grades/lower level classrooms:* refers to kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms at the elementary level

*Upper grades classrooms:* refers to third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms

*Highly qualified teacher:* an instructor is fully certified and credentialed by the state; holds at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution; and demonstrates competence in each core content area, which he or she delivers instruction.

*Self-contained:* classrooms in which one teacher teaches all of the subjects to the same group of students.

*Team teaching:* the approach to teaching wherein one group of students is shared by a group, or team, of teachers. This term also refers to the practice of two teachers working together within the same classroom setting to teach one group of students.

*Traditional:* this term refers to the self-contained approach to organizational structure. One teacher is responsible for teaching all core academic subjects to one group of students for the entire academic school year (Williams, 2009).

*ZPD:* Zone of proximal development is the difference between what a learner can do without help, and what they can't do.

### **Summary**

Classroom organizational structure and placement determinations affect students, teachers, and administrators every school year. This case study will offer administrators and teachers understanding on the various perceptions teachers have regarding departmentalization and self-contained classrooms and which structure teachers prefer. This study will offer guidance on this significant process, which directly influences student achievement. Administrators and school leaders can use the information and data

from this study to guarantee and ensure students are in classrooms which provide the best instruction and promote individual success for all students.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Elementary teachers and students in grades three through eight are under enormous accountability pressure to pass mandated tests which guide the current movement in education (Anderson, 2009). Standardized testing holds schools accountable for student learning in a majority of the United States of America. These tests are considered high-stakes because schools that do not show growth and progress or those who do not meet district or state goals became a target for intervention by the district or state (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). Federal policy has played a major role in supporting high-stakes testing and standards-based reform since the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994. That law mandated that states establish challenging performance and content standards for measuring student achievement, as well as performance reporting and consequences for low performance. Student performance on high-stakes tests reflects on teacher effectiveness and attempts to hold educators accountable for the students they teach. Georgia administrators are accountable for students' performance on their school's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI).

According to Klein, Zevenbergen, and Brown (2006), students took achievement tests every three to four years before the assessment reforms, and most were with norm-referenced tests. Standards-based instruction called for new types of tests, which measured acquired knowledge targets by standards with the results reported to the public. The reports and data informed the public taxpayers about the performance and progress of all schools while reflecting the effectiveness of the administration and teachers. Klein,



Zevenbergen, and Brown (2006) found administrators and teachers describe extreme anxiety, responsibility, and pressure to prepare students to pass the mandated test. Teachers thought it was wrong to measure the effectiveness and achievement of students using one single test (Klein, Zevenbergen, and Brown 2006).

High-stakes testing prompted educators and school leaders to consider the most effective methods for preparing students for the statewide assessments. One factor considered is classroom structure. Classroom structure is a commonly debated issue in public elementary schools. Educational leaders and administrators face challenging decisions when determining how to move students to mastery of the Common Core State Standards successfully (Kendall, 2011). Raising test scores and the accountability pressures were primary topics of discussion at the national, state, and local level (Canady & Rettig, 2008). There was a demand for more student-centered classrooms and challenging skill sets which students needed to possess to be college and career ready, but it was not clear if training elementary teachers to be specialists in departmentalized classrooms or generalists in self-contained classrooms best obtained these expectations (Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon, 2013).

The organizational structure in schools includes the delivery or presentation of core content (Williams, 2009). The literature regarding classroom organization at the elementary school level is extensive. An evaluation and review of literature connected to self-contained and departmentalized school structures including the background of the problem of the organizational structure of classrooms, the history of school organizational structure, and public school accountability is included in this chapter. The conceptual frameworks for the study will include Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory

and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theories, and previous research associated with self-contained and departmentalized structures. In the time of high-stakes testing and accountability, school leaders must find proactive ways to meet the challenging needs of all students and increase academic performance to reflect high student performance on state-mandated assessments (Palmer, 2016).

It has been over fifty years since President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the desire was that full educational opportunity would be our first national goal (US Department of Education). Historically, self-contained classes were the main classroom format. This structure has been used in the public school setting for decades; however, the classroom environment became more popular after implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) spread across the United States. The No Child Left Behind Act required all students to take a standardized test in reading and math in grades 3-8 to measure student learning. Teachers' responsibilities were to ensure students ultimately mastered the standards and passed these high-stakes assessments. According to Reddell (2010), "NCLB is what set the testing frenzy in the United States in motion" (p.5). Schools placed students in self-contained classes to assure test scores remained exemplary and the pass rate for all students met the federal expectations (Reddell, 2010).

The conversation about whether to departmentalize or have self-contained classrooms is an ongoing topic in elementary schools today, and elementary school structure is an issue debated by educators and administrators (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Two of the most frequently disputed formats for structuring elementary classes in America are the self-contained structure and the departmentalized structure at the

elementary level. The way schools use one or both models significantly varies across the country (American Association of School Administrators, 1965).

### **History of School Organizational Structures**

Organizational structure in school was a concern as early as the formation of public education. Thomas Jefferson was the first American to suggest creating a public school system and therefore formed the fundamentals of public education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Thattai, 2001). The common school reformers believed common schooling would create noble citizens and form a society free of poverty and crime. These reformers created free public education at the elementary level, and public education became available for all American children in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Common School Era**

The first public school opened in Boston in 1821. Students could attend school in Massachusetts by the 1830s and attendance was voluntary. The inadequately assembled schools included basic furniture and reduced lighting (Tozer, 2009). Horace Mann became an educational activist while serving as a senator. Mann lobbied in Massachusetts to create a state board of education and focused on discipline, teachers, morals, values in education, and school building (Tozer, 2009).

#### **One-Room Schoolhouses**

Most communities depended on one-room schoolhouses because of the high population of students in rural areas. Students were different in age, and teachers would use the Monitorial System which became popular in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The system is regarded as mutual instruction or the Bell-Lancaster method. The oldest children in the

family would teach the younger siblings, and they became “helpers” to the teacher (Tschurenev, 2008).

### **Federal Era**

At the end of the Civil War, northern states exclusively highlighted education and quickly recognized public schools. By 1870, every state had tax-subsidized elementary schools. From this point forward, public schools were on the rise and became more popular than those provided by the private sector. The United States flourished and had the highest literacy rate in the world; however, many rural areas did not have many schools before the 1880s.

### **Progressive Era**

The Progressive era or “progressive movement” lingered from the 1890s to the 1930s. This era was distinguished because of the extensive expansion of public schools, which served students in fast growing cities. Fifty percent of students had earned a high school diploma before 1940. New emphasis focused on increasing opportunities for students, and programs were established for students with special needs.

By the 20th century, the nature of the child became a new way of thinking. Classroom methods and the reason to educate children progressively controlled the education purpose (Reese, 2001). John Dewey became the leading educational theorist during the progressive era and was a primary advocate of progressive education. Dewey (1938) believed students deserved to attend school not only to gain content knowledge but also to gain life skills. He identified three important goals of education (a) the improvement of intelligence (b) the acquisition of socially useful skills, and (c) the healthy growth of the individual (Dewey, 1938).

Dewey also stressed the significance of educating the whole child by continuously being aware of the personal capabilities of the learner when building lessons and addressing difficulties in society through the lesson. Dewey stated, "To prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities." Dewey (1938) claimed school and education were influential in forming social change and reform. The ideas were widely discussed but only executed in few public schools. Dewey and the other progressive theorists faced a highly bureaucratic system of school administration habitually not sensitive to new processes.

### **The Rise of the Organizational Structure Debate**

Self-contained classes have an extensive past in schools in the United States. For decades school administrators and leaders have implemented different classroom structures to enhance student achievement and increase high student test scores (Hood, 2010). The conventional curriculum of many one-room schoolhouses prior to the 1950s was implemented in self-contained classrooms. Since the 1960s, one teacher to a classroom has been the dominant pattern in the organization of elementary classes and the most well-known model (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2000; Chan & Jarman, 2014; Tillman, 1960). In the early 1970s, educators discussed different organizational arrangements to change self-contained classes. Dawson and Lindstrom (1974) debated for drastic, new, and strategic changes in self-contained classrooms. Educators discussed the relevance and meaningfulness of self-contained classrooms. Barns (1973) determined a different organizational structure should take place in secondary education.

## **The Public School Accountability Movement**

School accountability is the method of evaluating school performance on the core of student performance measures. These evaluations are growing progressively prevalent in all parts of the world. In the United States accountability has become the core of Republican and Democratic federal administrations (Loeb & Figlio, 2011). During the 1990s, the standards-and-accountability movement began and gained momentum. In 1989, President George Bush and Governor Bill Clinton pushed for more rigorous assessments and student achievement on performance tests. They supported strictly examining students' tests results to see if expectations were met. During this time, Democratic and Republican governors constructed new ideas and recommendations upon each other's commitment. Massachusetts, Texas, and North Carolina soon passed school accountability laws (Loeb & Figlio, 2011). Over the last two decades, state and federal governments have had a major influence on school districts in the United States. National Education Summits ran in the years 1996, 1999, and 2001 where educational decision-makers focused on evaluating the influence of student performance.

### **No Child Left Behind Act**

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law in 2002, This law became the focus of many school districts. The intention of this federal law was to ensure 100% reading and math proficiency for all students across all states by 2014 (Lee & Wu, 2017). NCLB forced expensive mandates on school districts and state governments which included increasing the number of "highly-qualified teachers" and the creation of new student assessments (Dee, Goertz, & McGuinn, 2005). Many school districts faced substantial penalties for noncompliance and were alarmed

about the government withholding funding. The law called for replacing school leaders and teachers if these mandates were not upheld. The federal government did not support or provide enough funding to support these mandates, which made for a financial burden. No Child Left Behind created a financial burden with the costs estimated to develop new student assessments at \$7 billion (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2013).

Georgia's response to No Child Left Behind was to amend laws in 2001 and require administering the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in grades one through eight. Students would take the assessment designed to inform state and local district offices accurately. The CRCT measured students' achievement on state standards and was administered in the spring to elementary and middle school students in the areas of reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies (Patton, Reschly, & Appleton 2014). The CRCT supported the No Child Left Behind Act because it measured higher order thinking, provided diagnostic information, was valid and reliable, and based content on performance standards. The high-stakes accountability policy under No Child Left Behind created more examination and scrutiny into school performance. The one-size-fits-all strategy did not work and produced a discrepancy in incentives and irregular outcomes (Brown & Clift, 2010)

### **Common Core Standards**

Common Core State Standards initiatives began in 2009 and have been implemented in 48 states as of 2017. The initiative was launched to help assist the negative outcomes of the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative by adopting uniformly high standards so all students can be college and career ready (Common Core Standards, 2013). The federal government provided support to the implementation and adoption of

the Common Core State Standards through the RTTT program. In 2009, the U. S. Department of Education began a grant contest through RTTT to fund the growth of assessment systems, which resulted in two state assessment associations (Lee & Wu, 2017). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers designed a consortium which created Common Core in 2009. The major goal of this consortium was to inspire states to set standards with those set in other countries (Peterson, Barrows, & Gift 2016). To inspire states to carry out Common Core Standards, the U.S. Department of Education gave incentives in 2009 through the Race to the Top initiative. A proposal was made which would award grants totaling more than \$4.3 billion to those states that planned to accept reforms taken from the broad list delivered by the department (Peterson, Barrows, & Gift 2016). The move to standards-based teaching and the idea of common standards created disputes for many school districts as they prepared to support teachers through these changes (Rogers & Ansley, 2016). Content standards offered the basis for consistency with all standards-based reform elements and these standards proposed to guide curriculum development and subsequent instruction. The goal was to help teachers set instructional goals to offer well-defined expectations for student achievement in grades K-12 and increase performance (Troia, Olinghouse, Wilson, Stewart, Schools, Hawkins, & Kopke 2016).

### **Race to the Top**

The RTTT initiative was one of President Obama's administrative programs using a federal grant receiving \$4.35 billion in founding as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Race to the Top awarded grants to states that implemented



many educational policies and practices intended to increase student achievement. The initiative, supported and funded by the ED Recovery Act, was part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. If states obtained certain educational policies, implemented performance-based evaluations for teachers, and adopted common standards, states were awarded points.

States were scored using an application for funding worth 500 points, in order of weight, the selection criteria were: Great Teachers and Leaders (138 total points), State Success Factors (125 total points), Standards and Assessments (70 total points), General Selection Criteria (55 total points), Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 total points), and Data Systems to Support Instruction (47 total points). Several states transformed their policies and aggressively adopted common core standards. The Race to the Top initiative is a major contributing factor to 48 of the United States adopting Common Core Standards in grades K-12. States have attempted to adopt higher, more focused standards aligned to better prepare students for college and careers.

Throughout history in public education, the implementation of federal education policies has been described as developing common adaptation and compromise (Lee & Wu, 2017). Public schools strive to gain the public's acceptance and confidence although schools face a stronger demand for perfected productivity (Lee & Wu, 2017). The demands of testing accountability place exceptional pressure on teachers (Anderson, 2009). Administrators and school leaders are continuously looking for ways to improve classroom organization to better prepare students to become college and career ready.

## The Self-Contained Classroom

Delivering and organizing classroom instruction is the primary concern of teachers, administrators, and researchers when determining the best academic setting for students (McGrath & Rust 2002). For many years, middle and high schools have adopted a departmentalized approach while most elementary schools split into self-contained or traditional classrooms. The self-contained classroom model is the most frequently used organizational structure in elementary schools with classes configured by age and grade level. Many elementary school teachers comprehensively recognize and understand the self-contained classroom model. These educators describe the self-contained classroom as a class supervised by one teacher who provides learning opportunities for the majority of the school day (Tillman, 1960).

The self-contained classroom model has a long history in school systems across the United States where it is the most commonly used organization in elementary schools (Merritt, 2017). In a self-contained classroom, the student has one teacher who teaches independently in isolation throughout the school day, and students stay in the same classroom (Isenberg, The, & Walsh, 2015). The majority of elementary students are taught in a single self-contained class, and one teacher is responsible for all subject matter. Most students receive instruction as a single group of learners who stay together in one classroom (Beane, Toepfer, & Alessi, 1986; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Schubert, 1986).

The self-contained classroom structure is known as the traditional classroom, regular classroom, whole-class setting, general-purpose classroom, conventional classroom, resource classroom, or whole-full day classroom. In this type of setting,

teachers are expected to be generalists in all content areas and teach every subject as part of their curriculum. Most classroom teachers are not experts in all subject areas, and they must teach in areas where they have no specialization or interest in the subject (Hood, 2010). The overall environment of self-contained classes is among the simplest of school-classroom organizations (Merritt, 2015).

Self-contained classrooms raise many critical issues for educational decision makers to consider. Past research has shown self-contained models contribute to excessive workload and increased job-related stress for teachers (Stewart, 2015). The self-contained classroom is the most popular model for schools, yet little research is available on the effectiveness of the structure (Strohl, Schmertzing, & Hsiao, 2014). Using this model, elementary school teachers must know every single standard for every subject area, making it difficult for teachers to master the content of all subjects (Edwards & Reed, 2014). Some principals try to address the drawbacks of self-contained classes through departmentalization.

A study completed by McGrath and Rust (2002) followed a group of fifth and sixth grade students in departmentalized and self-contained classes. The authors of this study concluded students in self-contained classes made great gains on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) in language arts and science; however, there was not a significant difference in math, reading, or social studies (McGrath & Rust, 2002).

### **The Departmentalized Classroom Setting**

Departmentalization is a type of team teaching where teachers are specialists in one or more areas (Baker, 2011). These structures separate classes by subject matter with

classes taught by content specialist teachers. The idea became popular after 2002 when No Child Left Behind laws pushed for an increase in test scores. The discussion of whether to departmentalize or have self-contained classrooms is an ongoing issue in elementary schools today, and elementary school structure is an issue debated by educators and administrators (McGrath & Rust, 2002). The way schools use one or both of these models significantly vary across the country (American Association of School Administrators, 1965).

Departmentalizing provides opportunities for students to connect with several highly knowledgeable and skilled teachers who possess a vast array of knowledge, exposing them to many personalities and teaching styles (Yearwood, 2011).

Departmentalized instruction was applied in the early 1920s to positively organize and prepare students for secondary education (Page, 2009). Departmentalization is defined as:

having more than one teacher to teach academic core subjects in the areas of English, language arts, math, science and social studies. The teacher is exclusively responsible for the precise subject or unit of subjects. The teacher is not overwhelmed with teaching other subject areas like art, music or physical education. (American Association of School Administrators, 1965)

Teachers in departmentalized settings plan for fewer subject areas than do self-contained teachers. Districts are starting to departmentalize in the primary grades to meet the burdens and demands of testing accountability by providing students specified instruction (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). These demands of testing accountability place exceptional pressure on teachers (Anderson, 2009).

Chan and Jarmen (2004) suggested departmentalization offers specialization, and not losing instructional time by concentrating on other subject areas. Grade-level instructional teams are formed, and students are exposed to the instructional wisdom of various teachers. Departmentalization exposes students to the routine of middle school and prepares students for secondary transitions (Chan & Jarmen, 2004). Contrary to the benefits of departmentalization, Brower (1984) and Findley (1966) have noted collaboration problems occur between disciplines in the departmentalized setting, and not meeting students' emotional needs.

The American Association for School Administrators in 1965 announced the release of the study from 400 school systems who replied to a survey regarding departmentalization. Ninety-seven of the schools were implementing the departmentalization organizational structure in elementary schools (ASSA, 1965). The information from the study included accomplishments with flexible grouping, ability grouping within grade levels, and increased knowledge of subject areas taught.

### **Other Classroom Organizational Structures**

Departmentalized and self-contained models are not the only classroom organizational structures schools use to meet the needs of their students. Classroom organization captures the structural aspects of how a teacher structures his or her classroom. There are many other types of classroom organizational practices, including team teaching, co-teaching, and platooning. These models are often necessary for various reasons.

## **Team Teaching**

Team teaching usually involves a group of teachers working together regularly to help students learn and achieve their educational goals. The teachers work together to plan effective instruction and meet individual students' learning needs. Nickerson (2006) found the most common design of team teaching consisted of two to five teachers who have common planning during the school day, teach the same students, and share a common area within the school building. Nickerson (2006) reported team teaching has a long history in the traditional school setting and stated, "Team teaching has become an umbrella under which many differing arrangements of organizational structures and approaches to teaching have been attempted" (p. 8). Hampton (2007) found team teaching and departmentalization were more effective than self-contained classrooms in reading and math and recommended all principals in the district use this approach.

## **Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching originated in the 1960s and became popularized as an example of progressive education (Antzidiamantis, 2011). Progressive orders schools become student-centered with the curriculum and instruction designed to be child-centered and tailored to simplify the growth and raise the standards for all students. Co-teaching or partner teaching was used in programs meant to create reduced teacher-student ratios in the classroom. Co-teaching allows placing a large number of students in classrooms with two teachers when capacities do not warrant isolated small classes (Graue, Hatch, Rao, & Oen, 2007). In co-teaching teachers share instructional responsibility for a group of students in the same classroom.

## **Platooning**

Platooning involves elementary teachers moving away from teaching every subject and instead teaching one or two subjects throughout the school day. This concept grew in popularity after the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act increased pressure on schools to raise test scores (Gewertz, 2014). Gewertz (2014) described a school in Walla Walla, Washington where a group of second grade students spent the morning with one teacher who taught reading and writing and then moved to another teacher in the afternoon who taught math and science. With the pressures of implementing Common Core Standards and students being required to learn new skills, some schools are expanding the model by having teachers teach one or two content areas. Most commonly, this approach is used in grades 3-5, but in some cases, it is not uncommon for students as early as kindergarten.

### **Types of School Decision Making**

Elementary school principals play a significant role in creating shared decision-making which would affect classroom organizational structure. The role has shifted in the past from a traditional authoritarian role to the role of facilitator. Today data plays a significant role in informing decisions teachers make about instruction and the way to adapt instruction to meet the needs of learners (Lai & Schildkamp, 2013). Ikemoto and Marsh (2007) use the following broad definition to describe decision-making: “teachers, principals, and administrators’ systematically collecting and analyzing data to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools” (p. 108).

### **Other Findings on the Impact of Classroom Organizational Structure**

There has not been a great deal of research on the effectiveness of departmentalized classrooms, but the research available is significant. In 1912, Donald

DuShane conducted one of the first studies of departmentalization when he departmentalized the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades in a Madison, Indiana public elementary school. DuShane (1912) observed teachers and children in the departmentalized setting. He conducted interviews and surveys of school personnel to determine their feelings about the change in classroom structure. Teacher's attitudes and desires for teaching were observed during this study. DuShane noted teacher's abilities and interests were carefully considered in assigning subject areas to be taught. The teachers discussed the change freely and openly with (DuShane, 1916). DuShane concluded that departmentalization allowed teachers to become specialists in a certain subject, rather than generalist in all subject areas (DuShane, 1916). His research found students in the departmentalized setting were excelling more than students in the old self-contained structure. Teachers were asked if they felt more successful in the self-contained classroom setting compared to the departmentalized classroom setting. All teachers asked these questions expressed that they did not feel as effective in the self-contained classroom (DuShane, 2012). His findings suggested departmentalization had a positive impact on student achievement and teacher satisfaction in his district.

Baker (2011) emphasized many ideas and factors which schools must contemplate to certify student success before deciding to departmentalize. Baker conducted a qualitative study, which focused on 9<sup>th</sup> grade in a rural Pennsylvania district. Baker also suggested reviewing current institutional norms, interests, and knowledge of everyone involved so successful implementation of departmentalization occurs. The purpose of the study was to explore the decision-making process. Results indicated teachers enjoyed and



felt more comfortable in the departmentalized setting. The information accessible to stakeholders' persuaded their perceptions concerning departmentalization (Baker 2001).

Departmentalization allows teachers to teach one specific content area focusing on specific lessons during the day (Chang, Muñoz, & Koshewa, 2008). Chan and Garmen (2004) indicated numerous positive qualities of departmentalization, such as assisting students in transitions to middle school, creating grade-level teaming, and promoting teacher retention. Past research has revealed the traditional self-contained classroom model is lacking in several of the key characteristics connected to teacher competence.

Rogers (2012) studied principal perceptions of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms. This qualitative study revealed principals' perceptions varied drastically, and schools have the challenge of meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of the students in their building. The purpose of this study was to understand principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. Rogers (2012) completed a purposeful sampling method providing six information-rich cases along a continuum of organizational structure preferences from departmentalized to self-contained classrooms. Interviews were conducted with six principals and document analysis of the master schedules was reviewed. Each school provided data connected to the decisions principals made concerning organizational structures at the elementary school level. The continual comparative method for qualitative data analysis informed the development of study findings from collected data. Rogers' (2012) data from this study resulted in six major themes principals may consider before deciding on organizational structure at the elementary level. These themes included what works, transitions, it is all about the

people, relationships as the foundation, success with data, and stakeholders' perceptions matter. An examination of the conclusions incorporated how these themes fit within up-to-date literature on the topic, limited the study, and discussed suggestions for future research and practice.

Yearwood (2011) conducted a quantitative study to decide if fifth grade students who obtained instruction in a departmentalized setting achieved higher scale scores on the reading and math sections of the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) than students educated in a conventional classroom setting. Students from 29 elementary schools in the district were the particular focus of the study and served as the sample. Students were between the ages of nine and 11 years and were sorted into two groups: (a) students who received instruction in a departmentalized setting and (b) students who received instruction in a traditional setting. There were a total of 2,152 students in the sample. Yearwood (2001) found that students who obtained instruction in a departmentalized setting achieved higher scores on the reading and math portions of the 2010 CRCT. The socio-cultural theory, the theory of constructivism, and the social constructivist theory were selected as the supporting frameworks for Yearwood's research study to link the significance of the classroom setting in which students learn best and their acquisition and development of knowledge. The results suggest students who received instruction in departmentalized classroom settings scored higher on the reading and math portions of the 2010 CRCT.

Page (2009) examined 50 school districts and the results of departmentalization within those districts. First, the researcher decided if school districts implemented self-contained or departmentalized classes in the sixth grade. Then he examined the two

groups to determine whether there was a difference in the percentage of learners scoring in the top two quartiles on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The study showed no causal relationship between students scoring in the top two quartiles on the assessment from schools where students were in departmentalized classes (Page, 2009).

Cox (2016) studied a departmentalized group showing significant change occurred in student performance from the pre/post implementation test on ARMT scores. The results suggested when appropriate grouping is implemented properly, student achievement increases. This mixed-methods study assessed the implementation of Hybrid Grouping at Angel Elementary School in Alabama. The Hybrid Grouping model includes three components: achievement grouping, departmentalization, and self-contained classes. The data gathered permitted participants (n = 20) to discuss and communicate their perceptions of the leadership and management of the school and its connection to the implementation of Hybrid Grouping and school climate. The study used teachers' perceptions surveys, interviews, and the Alabama reading and math test score data. Three constructivist theories were the framework for this study. Constructivist theories consist of social constructivism posited by Vygotsky (1978), cognitive constructivism formulated by Jean Piaget (1952, 1954, 1962) and pragmatism as described by Dewey (1916/2012). These theorists supported the idea of social interaction with children and their environment, as well as, the importance of participating in hands-on direct activities. These theorists believed social interaction was significant and essential to children and their social, cultural, and personal development.

Gerretson (2008) conducted a study to identify issues correlated with the emergent use of teacher specialists in elementary schools, predominantly in the area of

mathematics. The study concentrated on the effects and influence of departmentalized settings and traditional classroom settings in math. The study took place in northwestern Florida in a large, metropolitan school district. The study discovered that teachers who concentrate on a particular subject area were inspired to deliver successful classroom instruction.

Stewart (2015) conducted a study on teachers' perspectives on self-contained and departmentalized instructional models. Teachers selected had taught in both a self-contained and departmentalized classroom setting. Through interviews, surveys, and a focus group, teachers expressed their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of both classroom designs. The main conclusion of this study showed overall the departmentalized instruction model is preferred by teachers. Teachers expressed that departmentalization allows teachers to become experts in their desired subject areas while fostering and encouraging communication and teamwork between teachers. In the departmentalized environment, students and teachers became a group of learners. The researcher suggests further research would better inform the debate on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms to conclude which model best supports elementary students' needs.

Butzin, Carroll, and Lutz (2006) conducted a pilot study at South Heights Elementary School in Henderson County, Kentucky. This school was named an at-risk school performing the lowest in the county, which teachers attributed to poverty, lack of parent involvement, discipline, and staff turnover (Butzin et al., 2006). For this study, the researcher recruited three teachers to try a departmentalized approach for three classes in grades three, four, and five. The teachers agreed to teach the same subjects for the next

few years. After the first year, the students were outperforming students in self-contained classrooms. At the end of the three-year pilot study, South Heights Elementary School implemented the project school-wide, and after five years of implementing departmentalization, the school exceeded local and state expectations (Butzin, Carroll, & Lutz, 2006). In 2004, the school was recognized as a National School Change Award winner (Butzin et al., 2006, p. 368).

Hava and Lea (2015) conducted a study to examine whether the self-contained classroom meets the needs of all learners. They considered the existing and desired aspects perceived by students, parents, and teachers. The study offered a comprehensive view of the self-contained classroom. Forty two participants took part in the study: 20 students, 15 parents, and 7 teachers. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews which focused on perceptions of desirable aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom. The data collected showed students had a positive attitude toward being grouped in the self-contained classroom. Parents were also satisfied with the organization of the classroom and were satisfied with the opportunity for students to work with the same population throughout the day (Hava and Lea, 2015). This study showed placing and grouping students in a self-contained classroom in elementary school displays important advantages from all examined aspects.

### **Teacher Workload**

Classroom teachers are under enormous stress with the increasing workload such as paperwork and planning and preparing to teach the curriculum for all subject areas in the elementary classroom setting (Stewart, 2015). Because of these issues, teachers are not staying in the profession for very long, and they are often dissatisfied with their jobs.

Previous studies have noted the many barriers self-contained classrooms have on teachers and students (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Studies found teacher burnout led to teachers leaving the field of education and had a negative impact on students' achievement (Chang 2009). Key themes in the literature about teacher burnout were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of inefficacy (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Another study found that high teacher turnover due to exhaustion can be overturned by lessening teacher workload and increasing job contentment (Bridges & Searle, 2011; Timms, Graham, & Cottrell, 2007). Departmentalized classrooms allow teachers to prepare lessons for one class of students and focus their planning on a specific area. Teachers are able to design more original and inventive lesson plans, which stimulate students' learning at a higher level and increases teacher satisfaction (Liu, 2011).

### **Teacher Turnover Rate**

Teacher burnout intensifies over time because of persistent stress in the work environment. Over eleven studies evaluated the relationship between self-efficacy, a teacher's trust in their own teaching capabilities, and the three dimensions of burnout in teachers. The three dimensions of teacher burnout consist of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or feeling detached from one's work at the school, and lack of personal accomplishment (Brown, 2012). These studies concluded that there is a negative relationship between self-efficacy and teacher burnout. Most administrators want to find ways to lessen the teacher turnover rate. If teachers are focused on their favorite parts of the curriculum, they are more passionate about the content which will show in their teaching (Strohl, Schmertzing, Schmertzing, & Hsiao, 2014). Departmentalized instruction decreases and reduces teachers' workloads, since teachers focus on teaching a

specific content area, rather than several different subjects. This results in a decrease in job-related stress and job fulfillment improves, which improves the retention of highly qualified teachers (Anderson, 1962; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Chang, Muñoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Strohl, Schmertzing, Schmertzing, & Hsiao, 2014). Teacher turnover is a substantial concern nationwide. Roughly, over one-third of United States teachers leave the profession within the first three years, and almost half leave the profession after five years (Ingersoll, 2001). Even with the high cost of advanced degrees, nearly 16% of all teachers quit the profession every year causing the turnover rate to be five times higher than other professions (Riggs, 2013). High teacher turnover rates adversely influence students' achievement, and students frequently have beginning teachers who are often learning and in survival mode (Huling, 1998).

Strohl et al. (2014) completed a qualitative case study which explored perceptions between departmentalized classrooms and self-contained classrooms at the same school regarding teacher workload. The researcher collected data from first, second, and third grade teachers working in a Georgia school district. There were 29 total teachers participating in this study. Seventeen teachers worked in a traditional self-contained structure, and 12 teachers worked in a departmentalized setting. The researchers analyzed the surveys, interviews, and focus groups and found the workload requirements given to teachers are a main source of job dissatisfaction. The study found teacher workload negatively affects teachers, adding stress and dissatisfaction in job performance. Teachers who have a high level of stress were not satisfied with their jobs and had negative interactions working with students (Strohl, 2014). Henley (2007) recognized there is intense pressure on teachers in today's society, and more than ever,

talented people are being driven away from the profession because they are not getting the support they need.

### **Student–Teacher Relationship**

Supportive student–teacher relationships are critical at the elementary level, and studies suggest they help students adapt, learn, and achieve. It is critical for students to have excellent school experiences as they develop their attitudes toward school and learning (Chang, Muñoz, & Koshewa, 2008). Elementary-age students especially need positive adult interactions with their teachers, and the relationship with their teacher significantly correlates with student achievement (Cohen, 2011). Students need to have feelings of trust and respect to succeed academically and socially. Schools who choose the departmentalization approach must work hard to develop positive student relationships as well as a positive school climate (Cohen, 2011). The literature also examined the importance of school climate and the need for all stakeholders to work together. Teachers must try to make a concerted effort to establish positive relationships with all students and understand the importance of their job as their teacher in a self-contained or departmentalized classroom setting.

Stewart (2015) conducted a study on teacher relationships with students who are taught in a departmentalized and self-contained classroom. She found one teacher chose the self-contained model over the departmentalized model because she thought she was able to get to know her students better. When teaching in a departmentalized setting, she was not able to connect with individual students. On the research survey, teachers expressed that in the self-contained structure they had a sufficient amount of time and opportunities to learn about all students and assist students who needed additional help.



In the departmentalized settings, a teacher thought there are still plenty of opportunities to bond and get to know students as well as time provided to assist with additional help (Stewart, 2015).

### **Considering the Perspectives of All Stakeholders**

According to a study conducted into the perspectives of school principals regarding self-contained and departmentalized classroom organizations, Rogers (2012) found there are six themes that emerged from his interviews and data collections with principals. One of those themes was stakeholders' perceptions matter. This literature review has focused primarily on the teacher perspective of classroom organizational structure, but the researcher will now explore the perspectives of other stakeholders to provide a well-rounded view of each teaching model.

#### **Principal Perspectives**

Results from Rogers' (2012) study indicate divided perspectives from school administrators. The difference in views connects to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1971). Principals who sought to meet the lower levels on the pyramid of needs, known as deficiency needs, favored the self-contained classroom model, whereas principals who were more focused on the higher levels of the pyramid which allow for exploration of academic subjects, known as growth needs, preferred the departmentalized classroom organization (Rogers, 2012).

According to McPartland (1987), the self-contained classroom structure has a positive correlation to student-teacher relationships. The principals who preferred the self-contained structure likely recognized self-contained classrooms allow time for teachers to form positive relationships with their students. McPartland (1987) found

departmentalization improves the quality of instruction by having the teacher specialize in one subject area. Principals who favored departmentalization likely think it boosts the quality of instruction by having a teacher who is a content expert. Differences in preference may relate to the needs of the students at a principal's school.

### **Student Perspectives**

Because students are the ones who decisions about organizational structure ultimately affect, it is imperative to consider their perspective regarding classroom organization. Marzano (1992) proposes the lack of positive perceptions from the student can have a devastating impact on student learning, making it unlikely the student will learn at a proficient level. Hanks (2013) conducted a focus study into the perceptions and attitude of fifth grade students toward departmentalization at a Midwestern private school. Students completed surveys indicating their perceptions about the departmentalized fifth grade program before entering the program and upon completion. Overall, the students' attitudes toward changing classes, having more than one teacher, and completing assignments for multiple classes were positive. Not only were students' perceptions toward the departmentalized setting optimistic, but also the students' grades reflected success within this setting. These students' end-of-the-year grades either improved or remained the same after entering a departmentalized fifth grade year.

In a survey study into the perceptions of stakeholders toward departmentalization conducted by Reed (2002), student participants indicated they liked being able to move from class to class and enjoy multiple teachers. The student attitudes from this study were not all positive. Students thought switching classes caused a loss of instructional time. Some participants also stated managing materials for four different classes could be

overwhelming. Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa (2008) found negative student perceptions toward departmentalization. Students indicated the departmentalized setting decreased trust, support, and respect for teachers as compared to the self-contained classroom. These inconsistent results warrant more investigation into the attitudes of students toward different organizational structures.

### **Parent Perspectives**

Parents have a stake in the organizational structure debate. According to a qualitative study by Reed (2002), parents who took part in the survey process thought their children could be successful in a departmentalized setting; however, some parents were concerned the teacher did not value their child as an individual. Marzano's (2011) research indicates it can be difficult for a student to have a connection and relationship with each teacher throughout the day in a departmentalized setting. Likewise, it can be difficult for a teacher to feel connected to each of his/her students. Parents did not feel their children could manage the materials needed for four classes, and conferencing was difficult due to the scheduling in a departmentalized setting. These parents seemed to favor a self-contained setting. Rogers (2012) found parents appreciated a departmentalized fifth grade level because it prepares students for departmentalization in middle school and beyond.

Much like the perceptions of teachers, the perceptions of principals, students, and parents differ vastly in their concerns about self-contained and departmentalized settings. There seems to be no one-size-fits-all answer to the organizational structure debate. The research examined in this literature review provides inconsistent findings and no conclusive evidence on which organizational structure is best suited for students. Below,

Table 2.1 depicts the findings of these studies regarding organizational structure. The abundance of inconclusive findings suggests the need for further research into departmentalized and self-contained classroom organizations.

Table 1

*Studies of Classroom Organizational Structure and the Resulting Preferred Outcome*

Study	Departmentalized	Self-contained	Inconclusive
Cox (2016)	X		
McGrath and Rust (2002)			X
McPartland (1987)			X
Rogers (2012)			X
Watts (2012)			X
Yearwood (2011)	X		
DuShane(1912)	X		
Chan and Garmen (2004)	X		
Page (2009)	X		
Stewart (2015)			X

### Summary

The decision to have departmentalized or self-contained classrooms is a difficult choice for any educational leader, and the topic is still widely debated. There are many factors administrators must consider when deciding the best way to organize classrooms at the elementary level. The literature shows studies connected to elementary school classroom organizations are inconclusive and offer little guidance in determining the impact of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. Each year school leaders analyze data, conduct research, and collectively plan to ensure the right decision is being made for the organization. There are many positive and negative outcomes to consider when using either classroom structure. Piaget's theory

suggesting learning should be adapted to meet the developmental needs of the learner is pertinent to the discussion of organizational structure. Principals and other school leaders must consider what classroom structure best suits the needs of the students in their building before deciding whether to departmentalize or remain self-contained. After a careful review of the literature, there are benefits of both structures, and both ways of organizing a classroom are viable options which support student learning. Not only does the principal need to have data to support the decision to departmentalize or teach in a self-contained setting but they also must have teacher buy-in for this organizational structure to be implemented effectively. Administrators must look at these two organizational structures and decide the one best fits their teachers, students, and other support staff.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore teachers' perceptions on departmentalization versus self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. Past research suggests self-contained and departmentalized models have strengths and weaknesses, but the goal for each model is to increase student achievement (Chan & Garmen, 2004). This study will address three focus areas: teacher perceptions on departmentalized and self-contained classrooms, advantages and disadvantages of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms, and student achievement as it relates to classroom organizational structure. The current study will use a qualitative approach to answer the research questions. Analysis of teacher perceptions in the form of teacher semi-structured interviews will help create a more comprehensive representation of teacher perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms and their impact on student achievement. The researcher intends to fill this gap in the literature and contribute to the existing research by addressing this topic.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?

RQ2: To what extent do the teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classes differ?

RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?

4) Do teachers prefer one model to another?

### **Research Design**

To determine the perceptions of teachers regarding self-contained and departmentalized classes, the researcher chose a qualitative research design. Howson (2013) suggests qualitative research comes from a positivist view of the world and is used to measure things one can see looking to clarify, understand, and explain how a particular group of people experience and interpret events. This qualitative research design will use words to describe and disseminate the study information (Yin, 2014). The researcher collected teachers' responses in the natural setting. The researcher chose to conduct a qualitative study because the goal was to find the perceptions of teachers through their personal experiences teaching in a self-contained and departmentalized classroom setting. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis, and the interviewer and interviewees would learn more about particular aspects of themselves and the other with or without this being an exact part of the interactional exchange (Edwards & Holland 2013). Qualitative studies show how people interpret their experiences and how they make meaning of their personal experiences, drawing on theories, concepts, and models to structure and support a study (Merriam, 2002)

The qualitative case method is suitable for this study (Creswell, 2009). The researcher used semi-structured, open-ended interviews from teachers to gain an understanding of the perceptions teachers have on self-contained and departmentalized classrooms. According to Van (2014) semi-structured interview questions allow the researcher to capture authentic thoughts and experiences of the participant. The researcher administered the interviews to the faculty of the participating elementary

school. The interview contained questions (Appendix A) which provided data notifying the researcher of teachers' perceptions of departmentalized versus self-contained classrooms. The researcher analyzed the data after the survey was administered through a data collection program called NVivo. NVivo is qualitative data analysis software which organizes and stores data in one place and creates defensible conclusions related to the research topic. After the data was collected, the conclusions were organized into a table which incorporates data examination explanations (Creswell, 2009).

A case study is a methodology that involves a detailed investigation on a single component (Fraenkel & Wallen 2006). Shuttleworth (2008) suggests the case study research design has changed over the past few years as a valuable tool for exploring developments and certain situations. The advantage of the case study research design is to focus on a specific and interesting case and may be an attempt to test a theory with a specific topic that is of interest (Shuttleworth, 2008). He also suggests research should be thorough and note-taking should be meticulous and systematic. This case study will be used to gain meaning on teachers' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classroom organizations. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) explained case studies are used in research to pursue and learn a phenomenon by studying it directly and in depth. Fraenkel and Wallen defined a case study as a single individual, group, or significant sample that is studied to provide the researcher with valuable knowledge and details.

The researcher followed specific protocol in the research design and follow the appropriate steps for approval. The researcher completed the correct steps and submitted approval to conduct the study to the Office of Professional Learning in the school district (See Appendix B). Once permission was granted, the researcher submitted the correct



paperwork and documentation to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct the study. After being granted permission to conduct the study, the researcher sent a written request to the principal of the selected school to obtain consent for the proposed research study (see Appendix C). Once the principal granted permission of the study, the researcher sent the assistant principal two documents to send out to teachers in the school: (a) a formal/written invitation to teachers who were willing to take part in the study (Appendix D), and (b) notification to the participants of the procedures and purpose of the study including a guarantee of the confidentiality of their participation (Appendix E). After gathering the responses from the survey, the researcher accepted 9 participants for the study. The researcher accepted teachers who responded first to take part in the study and who met the classification requests. The population consisted of teachers who meet the following criteria: (a) five years or more of teaching experience, (b) experience teaching in both a self-contained classroom and departmentalized classroom at the elementary level, (c) currently teaching grades kindergarten through fifth grade, and (d) certified in elementary education.

The survey results were collected and separated into groups that will aid in forming the purposeful sampling group. Gay and Artisian (2003) suggest that qualitative research most often deals with small, purposive samples and the researcher's insights guide the selection of participants. A signed consent will be obtained from each participant at the interview. The interviews were conducted at the participant's school so participants were comfortable and at ease. Creswell (2009) suggests researchers should collect their data in the natural setting where the participant feels comfortable and experiences the issue of interest. The purpose of the study was explained to the

participant, and the researcher explained that all responses are private and confidential. The researcher explained to the participants that the interview will be audio-recorded using a password-protected computer. The researcher began the interview with questions about demographics and past teaching experiences, and the semi-structured interview began. Van (2014) suggests semi-structured interviews contain predetermined questions, but order can be modified based on the interviewer's perception of what seems most suitable. Question wording can be changed and explanations given, inappropriate questions for a particular interviewee can be omitted, or additional ones can be included (Van, 2014). Every participant recorded the same key questions, but the questions were asked in a flexible manner. These questions were useful for exploring the perceptions the participants have on self-contained and departmentalized classroom structures.

The researcher took detailed notes during the interview with each participant and will ask participants to elaborate on questions when needed. Creswell (2018) suggests documenting qualitative research using field notes to understand the participant's experiences of the events. Once the interview was complete, the interview was transcribed by the researcher. The researcher used the program NVivo to analyze the interview transcripts and to organize and analyze the data of the semi-structured interviews. NVivo categorized data and code findings such as themes and models to generate categories and themes. Saldaña (2015) suggests qualitative data analysis coding translates data for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes. Madden (2010) suggests coding improves authentic value to a research study.

Below is a graph that represents this data analysis software. Using the NVivo program allowed the researcher to color code the themes in each interview and organize tables and graphs to understand and organize the data collected.

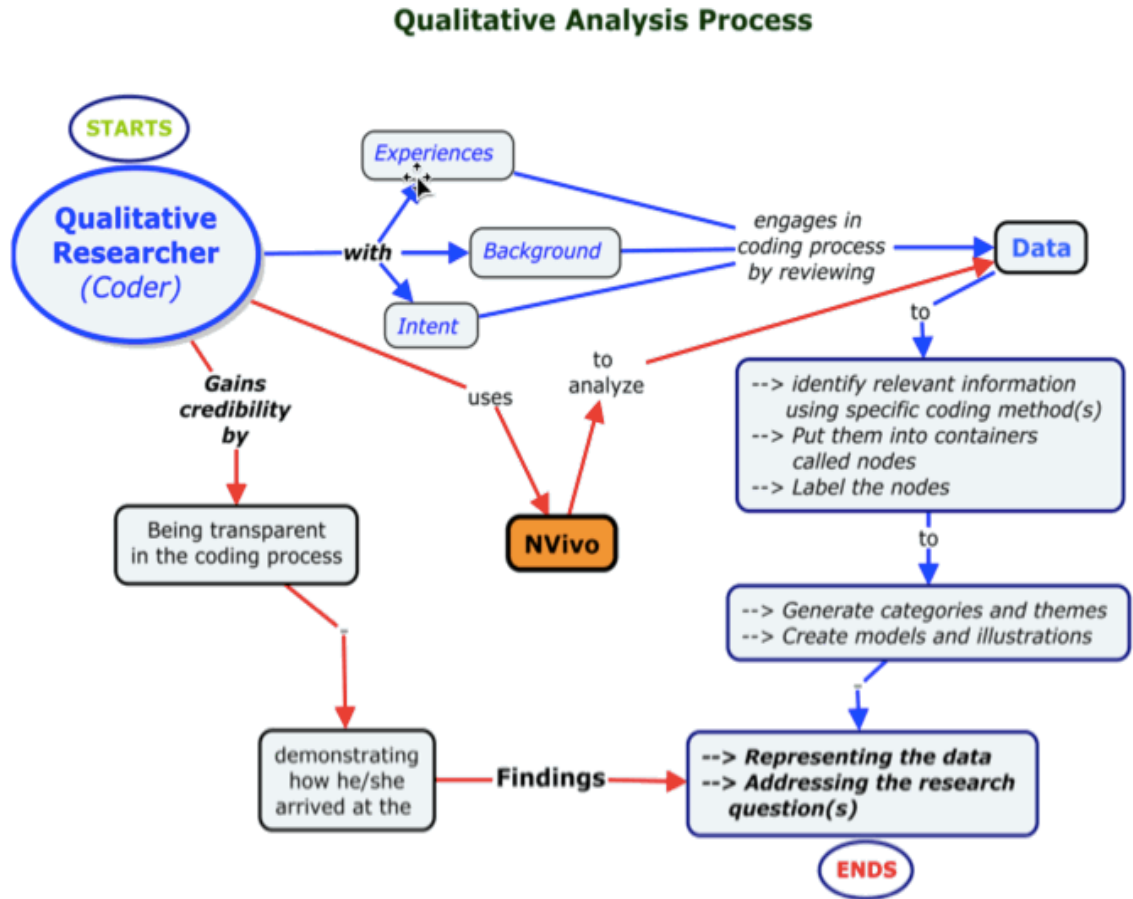


Figure 2. Qualitative analysis process. This figure illustrates how qualitative data is coded and organized into themes retrieved from NVivo research homepage.

### Population

The researcher predicted to determine the perceptions and views of teachers with regard to departmentalized or self-contained classrooms. This section provides a description of the population and sampling design used in this study. The researcher choose teachers who have taught in self-contained and departmentalized settings at the elementary level with a total of at least five years of teaching experience. The researcher

choose pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the district, school, and individuals participating in the study. The faculty and staff at the school are dedicated and committed to provide the best instruction for all students. These teachers are employed in a school district in Middle Georgia.

The participants for this qualitative study were purposefully selected. This type of sampling allows for information-rich cases, which will provide a deep understanding of the significance and meaning behind classroom organizational structures used in elementary schools. Classroom teachers will be interviewed for this research. These teachers were selected because they all have taught in self-contained and departmentalized classrooms and meet the criteria on the survey questionnaire.

The school used in this study has a free and reduced lunch population rate of 49 percent. The elementary school is located in an urban area, and it contains about 800 students. The school has an ethnically diverse population comprised of 30% African American, 45% Caucasian, 20% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 1% multi-racial. The school had the second highest CCRPI score in the county and was named a Georgia School of Excellence in 2017-2018 school year.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were elementary school teachers currently employed in a school district in Middle Georgia. The researcher is an elementary school assistant principal, so the researcher selected to interview elementary teachers. After receiving permission from the IRB to conduct the study, the researcher scheduled a time to meet with the principal at the school about appropriate dates to address the teachers participating in the study. The researcher discussed the purpose and methodology of the

study and informed teachers that they would be receiving a time to meet and answer the interview questions. The interview questions (Appendix A) were originally designed and piloted by Richard Rogers (2012) in the dissertation study *Principals' Perceptions of Departmentalization and Self-Contained Classrooms at the Elementary School Level*. Teachers were informed that the interview responses are confidential, though not anonymous, as a stratified purposeful sample (Creswell, 2014) of teachers was created based on varying responses.

### **Sampling**

After collecting the survey data, the interviewees were selected using stratified purposeful sampling. Benoot, Hannes and Bilsen (2016) implied that purposeful sampling is extensively used in qualitative research for the documentation and collection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Patton (2015) provides the following description of purposeful sampling:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry... Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding. (p. 264)

Patton (2015) further identifies purposeful sampling applies exclusively to qualitative research. This case study required elementary education teachers with experience in the self-contained and departmentalized classrooms with five years of teaching experience.

## **Instrumentation**

The interview questions the researcher used were developed by Richard Rogers (2012) and modified with permission requested by the researcher (Appendix A). The researcher adapted the interview questions to fit the needs of this research study, changing the focus of the research questions to teacher perceptions instead of focusing on principal perceptions. The interview questions focused on teachers' individual perceptions of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms. The researcher interviewed the participants individually and recorded detailed notes when needed during the interview. After each interview the researcher downloaded the audio file and transcribed the interview session. The researcher uploaded the file to NVivo to organize, dissect, and analyze the data.

## **Ethical Considerations**

There are many considerations the researcher addressed regarding the effects on the educational research community, specifically that the researcher has a responsibility to participants. Following IRB approval, the researcher promised participants the rights to privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and will guarantee participant rights to privacy, to anonymity, to confidentiality, and to prevent harm, betrayal, or deception (Govil, 2013). Participants in the study received informed consent and had the option to withdraw from taking part in the study at any time.

Research which involves human subjects or participants raises unique and complex ethical issues. The researcher chose to interview participants who strictly volunteered for the study. During the interviews an informed consent was presented to each participant, and the participants were informed of the purpose and procedures. Each

participant was advised and informed that the study is confidential and all responses are confidential and private. Each participant was able to withdrawal from the study at any time during the investigation.

### **Pilot Study/Validation**

Pilot studies are preliminary small scale studies conducted to investigate crucial components of a main study, and these studies are usually randomized, controlled trials (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The objective of a pilot study is to enhance data collection and allow participants to interpret results and implications correctly (Creswell, 2014). Gay & Airasian (2000) found that pilot studies are conducted to evaluate critical components in qualitative research studies. A pilot study was chosen for this research to test the effectiveness of the questionnaire using a small sample size compared to the larger sample size intended for this study.

The researcher chose to conduct a pilot study using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to a small sample at a middle Georgia elementary school that has self-contained and departmentalized classrooms. Four teachers were chosen to participate in the pilot study which was administered on the school's campus after school hours. The researcher met with each participant and asked the participants the same eleven questions intended for the semi-structured interviews. Administering this pilot study gave the researcher valuable information and understanding of the questions prior to the larger study and will improve the quality and efficiency of the main study. The researcher was also able to time each interview and understand the amount of time needed for completion of the main study.

## **Data Collection**

The researcher chose individual interviews to use as the primary source for data collection. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) allowed the researcher to respond to the ideas and responses of the individuals during the interview period (Merriam, 2009). The data was collected through individual interviews. The interviews were recorded using a Quick Time Player recorder, and the recordings were secure and password-protected. After the completion of the interview, the researcher transcribed each interview, and the participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcription to ensure precision and accuracy. The researcher examined and analyzed the manuscript to code the information appropriately. The researcher used the computer analysis program NVivo to categorize and consolidate the data looking for themes and subthemes found in the data. The researcher documented themes and subthemes found in the data along with details and the number of times themes existed in the data. The researcher then organized the data in charts and tables for clarity and ease for the reader to understand.

## **Response Rate/Researcher as an Instrument**

A total of 50 certified staff members from a Middle Georgia elementary school were emailed participation requests inviting them to participate in a semi-structured, individual interview (Appendix E). Each respondent who was willing to participate received informed consent forms prior to participating in the study. The researcher's goal was to obtain a response rate of 20% of the invited teachers volunteering to participate in the study. The researcher believed this sample size yielded enough perspectives to allow generalizations to be made about interview results.



## **Data Analysis**

For this qualitative study, data was collected through single interview sessions and recorded on an audio recorder. All recordings were stored in a password-protected location. The computer program NVivo was used to code the responses to interviews. The researcher chose this software because coding the consistency of codes or nodes generated is crucial. NVivo assisted the researcher in identifying the relationships between codes and nodes to understand underlying ideas and the true meanings among them. How the results are presented to the reader will impact the credibility of the results. To ensure credibility, the researcher presented each theme with its particular meaning and evidence from the data. The visual representation of the themes, their relationships, and related ideas will help the reader to better understand the findings (Saldana, 2013). The data was reported, and a narrative was used to explain and organize the common themes.

## **Methodological Assumptions**

Several assumptions support the study design for collecting information. Measures were taken to ensure the assumptions remain valid during the study. The first assumption was study participants are a representation of a subpopulation of all teachers who have five years of experience and are state certified. The second assumption was teachers chosen to take part in this research study would answer all questions truthfully. Melrose (2009) noted people form naturalistic generalizations when answering questions based on their personal lives experiences. Study participants were required to sign an informed consent form which stated their participation involved answering all interview guide questions truthfully and honestly, being ethical and unbiased in their responses, and

giving consent to have their interviews audio recorded. The following assumptions were made based on this research:

- 1) Each participant was honest in his or her responses during the interview process.
- 2) Classroom organization is critical to student achievement and performance.
- 3) Teachers' perceptions on classroom organization will provide guidance in scheduling.

### **Methodological Limitations**

Steps were taken to mitigate the potential weakness of interpreting the answers. These steps included clarification of the answer to the participant by the interviewer and providing the interview transcript to the participant to confirm his or her answers. One limitation of the study was the dependence on honesty of responses by the participants during the interview phase of the study. Selected participants might not answer truthfully or at all.

To assure honest and accurate responses, a number of steps were taken. The anonymity of participants was protected. Names were not placed on any list or other communication related to the study. Participants were instructed to keep their participant confidentiality among their peers. Each participant was interviewed on a different day and different times after most of the staff has left the building for the day. It was assumed after the respondents receive a guarantee of privacy regarding their individual responses that, participants would respond honestly to interview guide questions, and the data collected would be from a representative sample.

In the report, some responses were combined to protect identification of any individual response. The second limitation involved targeting only a single subpopulation of teachers with five years of classroom experience and state certification. Limiting the study to a sample of one population can cause an overestimation of the generalizations made within the study and the application to other Georgia school districts. The third limitation involved restricting the study to a district in middle Georgia. The school district chosen for the study is representative of the surrounding school districts in student demographics, which provides a mitigation of the limitation as a potential weakness.

#### Trustworthiness

In qualitative research trustworthiness or truth-value of qualitative research and clarity of the conduct of the study are crucial to the usefulness and integrity of the findings (Cope, 2014). The researcher depended upon integrity and trustworthiness in this study. According to Amankwaa (2016) there are four areas that strengthen trustworthiness in a qualitative study: (a) credibility assurance in the 'truth' of the finding, (b) transferability, showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts, (c) dependability, showing the findings are consistent and could be repeated, (d) conformability, a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. The researcher used semi-structured interviews for this study and ensured these four areas were addressed with each participant. Other strategies were used to assure trustworthiness in the study. These strategies include (a) understanding the population, (b) conveying the data analysis process, (c) reconstructing data collection memories and being open to

change, (d) comparing themes, and (e) incorporating member checks into the data analysis process (Kornbluh, 2015). The researcher illustrated each step in this study and maintained a neutral frame of mind during the study.

Table 2

*Research Confirmation Table*

Research question	Instrumentation/ analysis	How will strategy answer my research question?
What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?	Semi-structured interviews, analyzed through coding and using NVivo software	Interviews will provide the researcher with the data on teacher perceptions of classroom organization
To what extent did the teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classes differ?	Semi-structured interviews, analyzed through coding and using NVivo software	Interviews will provide the researcher with the data on teacher perceptions of classroom organization
What were the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?	Semi-structured interviews, analyzed through coding and using NVivo software	Interviews will provide the researcher with the data on teacher perceptions of classroom organization
Do teachers prefer one model to another?	Semi-structured interviews, analyzed through coding and using NVivo software	Interviews will provide the researcher with the data on teacher perceptions of classroom organization

Table 3

*Item Analysis*

Item	Research	Interview question	Research questions
1. Thoughts on classroom organization	Rogers, 2012	1	3, 4
2. How self-contained classes are perceived	Rogers, 2012	2	1,2,3
3. How departmentalized classes are perceived	Young, 2015	3	1, 2
4. What conversation feedback looks like	Young, 2015	4	1, 2
5. How feedback influences teaching performance	Cherasaro et al., 2016	5	1, 2
6. How feedback influences motivation	Cherasaro et al., 2016	6	1, 2
7. Positive feedback vs. improvement feedback	Anast-May et al., 2011; Cherasaro et al., 2016	7	1, 2
8. Evaluation feedback and improved performance	Anast-May et al., 2011	8	1, 2
9. Feedback perceptions	Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Myung & Martinez, 2013	9	1, 2
10. Difference between self-contained and departmentalized classrooms	Myung & Martinez, 2013	10	1, 2

**Reporting the Data**

The results of this qualitative study are reported in Chapter IV. Chapter IV discussed the results and highlighted the findings of the study's research questions. The chapter highlights the patterns and themes found as a result of the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The results offer the researcher the opportunity to reflect on the practical and theoretical implications and report the findings using tables and graphs.

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. This study addresses three focus areas: teacher perceptions on departmentalized and self-contained classrooms, advantages and disadvantages of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms, and student achievement related to classroom organizational structure. The current study uses a qualitative approach to answer the research questions. Analysis of teacher perceptions in the forms of teacher questionnaires and semi-structured interviews create a more comprehensive representation of departmentalization and its impact on student achievement as well as the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization. The collected data will help educators make instructional decisions for classroom organization. Findings and conclusions are displayed in matrix and table format. Through the qualitative study, the researcher attempts to achieve a holistic and comprehensive analysis of teacher perception and data related to impact on student achievement as well as the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This qualitative research study was designed to determine teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary school level. Each school year, principals and educational leaders make decisions about which classroom organizational model works best in their buildings, and these decisions significantly impact teachers and students. Understanding teachers' perceptions gives principals and other educational leaders insight to allow for better decision-making regarding classroom organizational structure. This chapter includes the results of the data collected in the research study. These results detail the experiences of nine elementary school teachers who have worked in both self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. Through semi-structured, face-to-face and phone interviews, The researcher gathered information from these eight teachers. With this data collection process, each participant was able to share her personal feelings, perceptions, and experiences as a teacher. The findings are divided into five sections within this chapter: restatement of the purpose, theoretical overview, participants' profiles, findings for each research question, and summary.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative method and the researcher engaged in a bounded case study to capture teacher's perceptions. This method involves comparing data within each transcript to find comparisons and differentiations among parties within the purposeful sample selected for this study. The constant comparative method analyzes data in order to cultivate a grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that constant comparison guarantees that all data are

thoroughly compared to all other data in the data set. The initial coding allowed the researcher to see the data and analyze it sentence by sentence. Through NVivo the researcher was able to give codes and themes to trends of data.

According to Saldana (2015), coding is critical in qualitative data and allows the researcher to closely understand the data by finding similarities and differences.

After coding all of the data, patterns that were regular and consistent occurrences were identified. This coding process allowed for the development of categories and themes that captured the essence of teachers' perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms. The themes were established by answering the overall research question for this study, "What are teachers' perceptions of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms?"

### **Restatement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions on departmentalized and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level with respect to improving student achievement. From the experiences of the teachers who participated in this study, the reader will understand their perceptions and experiences related to organizational structure. This study will inform administrators on the critical decision they make concerning classroom structure. The research study was controlled by four research questions.

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?

RQ2: To what extent do the teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classes differ?



RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?

RQ4: Do teachers prefer one model to another? After a thorough analysis process, using semi-structured interviews, themes were classified and identified to reflect common perspectives of the study's eight research participants.

### **Theoretical Overview**

Guiding this study were the two conceptual frameworks of Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and sociocultural theories. The ideologies supported the research for the current study and the debate between departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. The researcher selected these theorists' works to connect the significance of the classroom environment to how students acquire their development of information and knowledge. These theoretical frameworks were referenced when exploring how and when students learn best (organizational structure). These two theorists deliberated on the setting where learning takes place, which makes their theories pertinent to the motivation of this research analysis.

Vygotsky (1935) justified children's learning environment and peer interaction provided a positive way to develop skills and strategies. Vygotsky's theory backed the idea that cognitive development deeply relies on the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Children get to this level when they take part in social activities and engage in social behavior. Full growth of the zone of proximal development depends upon full social engagement and interaction. Vygotsky believed children's relationships with the environment were important to developing their own internal processes. Vygotsky's

theories directly relate to this research study suggesting students should have different levels of ability and operate within their zone of proximal development in the classroom structure (McLeod, 2012).

Piaget (1954) thought children should construct their own meaning to gain understanding. Piaget's theory involves adapting instruction to meet all learners' developmental level (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2001). The teacher's role is to promote learning by providing various experiences. Piaget's theory of cognitive development is of significance in association with the nature-nurture examination. Piaget explained nature played a momentous part in understanding children go through the consistent stages of cognitive development in the same sequence. Piaget also believed a child's environment significantly influences development. The importance of finding the best classroom structure to address the individual needs of learners. Piaget suggested children become socialized while growing up, but Vygotsky declared children become individuals while they are growing up (Hasan, 2017). Regardless of which theorist is correct in this argument, one assertion follows both sides; the environment a child learns in (classroom organizational structure) impacts the child's development.

### **Participants' Demographics/Profiles**

Nine stakeholders were interviewed regarding their perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. These participants were all elementary teachers who have taught in both a self-contained and departmentalized classroom. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their identity (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Each participant was informed of all confidentiality procedures. They were also made aware that the contents from the interviews would be stored on a password

protected device and destroyed in three years. The following are brief descriptions of each participant and her current role as an educator.

Participants' demographics appear in Table 4. All participants were female. A brief description of each participant profile is included below to provide context to each teacher's perspective.

Table 4

*Participants' Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Education	Years' experience
Kimberly	53	White	Specialist	29
Lindsey	40	White	Specialist	14
Cheryl	55	White	Specialist	16
Kelly	41	White	Bachelor's	12
Elizabeth	40	White	Specialist	21
Ellie	38	African American	Specialist	13
Grace	53	White	Master's	9
Sherry	40	African American	Specialist	15
Brandy	49	African American	Master's	25

**Kimberly**

Kimberly is a female resident of Georgia who is in her early 50s. At the time of this study, this Caucasian female teacher had worked in education for a total of 29 years. Additionally, education was her first career. She holds a specialist's degree and has taught in the same elementary school for 29 years. She believed that her perception would be beneficial to this study because she has taught in both types of classrooms for many years and only taught at the elementary level. Kimberly stated that

departmentalization and team teaching were very beneficial in the upper grades but loved the idea of the self-contained classroom for the kindergarten students that she taught.

### **Lindsey**

Lindsey is a female participant in her late 30s who holds a Bachelor's, Master's, and specialist degree in education. At the time of this study, this Caucasian female teacher had worked in education for a total of 14 years. Additionally, education was her first career, and she has taught two elementary schools in her career. She is a resident of Georgia and is about to start her fifteenth year in education. She has taught pre-kindergarten, third grade and fourth grade. She has taught in both self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. She stated that team teaching is an ideal situation when you have two teachers working together and teaching in the area they are passionate about. She believed that it took a lot of faith in the other teammate to release control but felt teaming was the ideal situation.

### **Cheryl**

Cheryl is a female resident of Georgia who has been teaching for the past 16 years. At the time of this study, this Caucasian female teacher had worked in education for a total of 16 years. Additionally, education was not her first career. Her first full-time job was on Robins Air Force Base in Georgia, and she earned a degree in Texas. She was a substitute teacher for many years in Texas, New Mexico, Georgia, and New York. She also taught in Japan at a school for girls. She has taught second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. She is in her early 50s and currently teaches 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

### **Kelly**

Kelly is a female Georgia resident who has just finished her 12<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. She began her teaching career in Waco, Texas where she worked for three different school districts. She taught fourth grade, first grade, and third grade. When she moved to Georgia, she became an intervention teacher and has done this job for the past 4 years. She currently teaches all grades as the intervention teacher and has taught in self-contained and departmentalized settings. She believed that departmentalizing classrooms at the elementary level worked best for kids and all the teachers involved.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is a female resident of Georgia who currently teaches in a Title I school. At the time of this study, this Caucasian female teacher had worked in education for a total of 21 years. Additionally, education was her first career. She is about to start her 22 year in an elementary school setting. She is currently the ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) teacher in grades K-5 at an elementary school in Georgia. She has taught in both a self-contained and departmentalized classroom at the elementary level. She believed that departmentalizing is a good idea for fourth and fifth grade students but she personally preferred teaching in a self-contained classroom.

### **Ellie**

Ellie is a female resident of Georgia who has been teaching for 13 years and just recently received a specialist degree in educational leadership. She is in her late 30s and has taught in both a self-contained and departmentalized classroom. At the time of this study, this African American female teacher had worked in education for 13 years and was about to start her 14<sup>th</sup> year in education. Additionally, education was her first career.

Currently she teaches in a Title I school in Georgia where she teaches 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. She was a hug advocate of the departmentalized setting and strongly believed that it helped with behavior issues. She believed that teaching in a departmentalized setting allowed her to teach more rigorously and allowed student to move around more.

### **Grace**

Grace is a female elementary teacher in Georgia who is in her early 50s. At the time of this study, this Caucasian female teacher had worked in education for a total of 9 years. Additionally, education was her second career. She has taught special education as an interrelated teacher. She has also taught fourth grade for one year and third grade for one year. She has a total of nine years of teaching experience and holds a master's degree. Grace has experience in both self-contained and departmentalized classroom settings. Grace believed that departmentalization was the better than self-contained classrooms because it gave students the opportunity to learn from other teachers and she felt students were more engaged when they were able to move around and learn from different teacher during the day.

### **Sherry**

Sherry is in her early 40s and has a specialist's degree in early childhood education. At the time of this study, this African American female teacher had worked in education for a total of 15 years. Additionally, education was her first career. She currently teaches fourth grade at a Title I school in Georgia. She has been teaching for 15 years and has taught in both a self-contained and departmentalized classroom. She has a master's degree in education, a bachelor's degree in education, and a master's degree in accounting. Sherry believed that departmentalization and teaming was ideal for third

through fifth grade. She was a former kindergarten teacher and believed that self-contained classrooms were best in kindergarten through second grade. She stated that her strength was in math and she would prefer to teach only math to different groups throughout the school day.

### **Brandy**

Brandy is a female Georgia resident who is in her late 40s. At the time of this study, this African American female teacher had worked in education for a total of 25 years. Additionally, education was her first career. She has taught for 25 years and has served severely, moderately, and mildly intellectual disabled students. During her career she has taught in a total of four schools and worked with children of all abilities. She has taught in both a self-contained and departmentalized class. She says that she gets burned out easily and likes to change often.

### **Findings**

Each participant answered a total of 11 interview questions to lead to her perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms. As the participants responded, additional questions were asked to expand on the participants' responses. These additional questions helped to add complexity and clarity to the research questions.

This study was guided by four research questions.

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?

RQ2: To what extent do the teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classes differ?

RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?

RQ4: Do teachers prefer one model to another?

After a thorough analysis of the semi-structured interviews, themes were identified to reflect common perspectives of the study's eight research participants. The rationale behind these research questions was to gain insight into the perceptions of teachers who preferred teaching in a self-contained or departmentalized classroom at the elementary level to guide educational decision-makers, such as principals and superintendents, on their choices regarding classroom structure.

Each participant was presented with the 11 interview questions (Appendix A) in a one-on-one interview. The data obtained answer the research questions, and additional questions were posed based on participants' responses. The participants were forthcoming and authentic. They expressed their passion as well as their perceptions regarding self-contained and departmentalized classrooms. Responses were transcribed using a data software program. Their responses were transcribed precisely and accurately only after listening to each interview numerous times to increase my understanding before coding.

The researcher followed a qualitative data analysis of participants' interviews to identify categories, common categories, and themes. Table 3 presents a list of all categories created from the coding of participants' interviews using the NVivo software program and themes generated from categories recognized by participants' responses.



Table 5

*Themes Generated Using NVivo*

Categories	Common categories	Themes
1. Teaching strengths	Strengths	1. Teachers as experts in certain subjects
2. Teachers as experts	Devote time	
3. Benefits to planning	Better lessons	
4. In depth activates	Focus on strength	
5. Confident in certain areas		
6. Focus on planning	Planning lessons	2. Rigorous and focused teaching in departmentalized classrooms
7. Better preparation	Build foundations	
8. Devote time	Enrichment	
9. Overwhelming	Challenging workload	
10. Workload	Increased workload	
11. Disorganized	Lesson planning	
12. Focus on planning	Planning	
13. Rigor	Rigorous lesson	
14. Rigorous planning	Rigorous	
15. Focus on teacher	Teacher preference	
16. Lessons	Lesson planning	
17. Focus on subjects	Focus	
18. Passion for subject	Favorite subject for teacher	
19. Passionate	Teacher's desire	
20. Strengths	Teacher preference	
21. Strong feelings	Strong passion	
22. Relationships	Build relationships	
23. Teams	Team building	
24. Team teaching	Teaming	
25. Personalities	Personality conflict	
26. Behavior	Behavior management	
27. Best interest	Best interest of child	4. Meets the social and emotional needs of students
28. Different teaching styles	Whole child	
29. Social environment	Social development	
30. Positive engagement	Positive experience	
31. Social needs	Social issues	
32. Social development	Socialization	
33. Exposure	Social structure	
34. Collaboration	Needs of students	
35. Collaborative process	Planning with team	
36. Collaborating	Planning for students	
37. Collaborate	Team teaching	
38. Working in a team	Team building	
39. Process of collaboration	Working towards a goal	
40. Planning for collaboration	Working with team teacher	
41. Improving collaboration process		
42. Team effort		
43. Team teaching		
44. Meeting needs		

Five themes which were described at length in this chapter developed logically from the data. Theme 1: Teachers as experts in certain subject areas, Theme 2: Rigorous focused teaching in certain subjects, Theme 3: Developing relationships with more than one teacher, Theme 4: Meeting the social and emotional needs of students, Theme 5: Collaborating with teammates. Participants' actual words were used to present the reader with real perceptions from their interviews as they connect with these five themes.

### **Theme 1**

Theme 1: Teachers as experts in certain subject areas. RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?

Table 6

*Categories and Common Categories Related to Theme 1*

Categories	Common categories	Theme
1. Teaching strengths	Strengths	1. Teachers as experts in certain subjects
2. Teachers as experts	Devote time	
3. Benefits to planning	Better lessons	
4. In depth activates	Focus on strength	
5. Confident in certain areas		
6. Focus on planning	Planning lessons	
7. Better preparation	Build foundations	
8. Devote time	Enrichment	
9. Overwhelming	Challenging workload	
10. Workload	Increased workload	
11. Disorganized	Lesson planning	
12. Focus on planning	Planning	

The ultimate goal of this study was to gain participants' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms and which model they preferred. A condition

for participation in this study was that all participants must have taught for at least 5 years and must have taught in a self-contained and departmentalized classroom. When I asked participants their perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level, six participants described the departmentalized classroom as the desired organizational structure. The participants spoke of the strengths that each teacher has and that one could not be an expert in all areas. Several teachers believed that they could not be equally proficient in teaching every subject area in the curriculum.

*Ellie* believes that departmentalization is a better fit for her.

I believe that both methods are beneficial. I prefer departmentalization. From the perspective of a teacher, you're able to focus on one or two subjects. You're able to dig into that subject. You're able to meet the needs of your students if you're only having to worry about one subject as opposed to four or five subjects.

As a parent, I appreciate it because it helps with behavior issues as well. If you're my child, who was in fifth grade when it was departmentalized, it helped him, because he was able to move from class to class and not sit in the classroom all day. So if I had to choose which route to take, I would like to do departmentalization.

Self-contained classes are great. You get to be with your students all day, you get to learn your students, you get to see their behaviors. You can still meet the needs of all your students in a self-contained classroom, but it's hard to dig into that subject and go real deep into it when you have to worry about other subjects as well. (Ellie, 2018)

According to the literature, during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, elementary school structure has been argued and debated by educators and administrators (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Chang, Muñoz, & Koshewa (2008) found that most students in elementary school receive their instruction from a single classroom teacher who is responsible for teaching all subject areas. The self-contained classroom organization is established on the foundation and hypothesis that an elementary school teacher is a Jack-or-Jill-of-all-trades who is equally strong in all areas of the elementary curriculum. Chang, Muñoz, & Koshewa (2008) suggest that intuitively most classroom teachers are not multi-talented, and that they have no choice but to teach in some areas where they have no fundamental interest.

As to their perceptions of how departmentalization worked, teachers expressed their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained classroom. Most participants felt that one teacher could focus more only having to teach two or three subjects instead of the five or six subject areas at the elementary level.

*Lindsey* described her view of departmentalization as follows:

I believe that departmentalization and going back and forth between two teachers is an ideal situation when you have two teachers who are teaching their strength areas and are comfortable with each other. I believe it takes a lot of faith in the other person to release some of that control that some of us teachers like to have. And you have to have a lot of faith in your teamwork, in your co-worker, if you're gonna do that. I do believe that is the ideal situation. (Lindsey, 2018)

*Kimberly* also expressed her affinity for departmentalization:

I think I would feel much more confident in my skills if I did not have to teach all subjects and would give me more time to plan. It would give me more time to hone my skills and make sure that my students were getting the best that I had to offer. (Kimberly, 2018)

*Kelly* also favored departmentalization:

I have taught both self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. I also did a job share in a first grade classroom. Following that, I did several years departmentalized in third grade, and I am a huge advocate for departmentalization. I think it offers a lot of benefits that end up being better for the students in the long run. I felt like, when I was in a departmentalized setting, that the rigor in my classroom was better, because I was able to devote all of my time to prepping two subjects versus all the subjects. Therefore, I got to put more effort into what I planned for my kids. We got to do more in-depth activities. I got to do more research on things and planned better lessons that prepared them in a more in-depth way. (Kelly, 2018)

*Sherry* advocated for departmentalization for upper elementary students:

When it comes to self-contained classrooms, I think it's very good for grades kindergarten through second grade because you get to teach all the content and you build your foundations for the kids. But once you get to third, fourth, and fifth grade, departmentalization is the key because you get to teach something that you are more comfortable with. Say for example, if I am a math specialist or the math guru, I can teach the math to that grade level. And once you start teaching a lesson, it gets better each day for each group. (Sherry, 2018)

*Brandy* described departmentalization for students with special needs as follows:

Oh, definitely prefer having, I guess, I guess, the departmentalized model. But I understand because of, I guess, the standards, and the pressure on the teachers to be able to teach the standards in a certain amount of time, and keep it moving, so to speak, I feel like, and I've heard from other teachers, it would be a burden to try to slow down or accommodate. Even though they have accommodations and modifications in our IEP, it still makes it even more complicated for the gen ed teacher to do the job, to be able to teach all the children. So these are things that I've heard that it slows them down, and there's certain behaviors that they're not able to address. And they do need that specialized, self-contained classroom to help with those issues. But in a perfect world, it would be great if ... that they would be able to participate wholly and in the departmentalized model. (Brandy, 2018)

Most teachers spoke of their college majors or specific educational training they had as teachers and why they felt stronger teaching certain subject areas. These teachers also stated that teachers cannot be proficient in all subject areas and that it requires a lot of extra work and preparation to plan for every subject at the elementary level.

## **Theme 2**

Theme 2: Rigorous/Focused teaching in certain subject areas. RQ4: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?

Table 7

*Categories and Common Categories Related to Theme 2*

Categories	Common categories	Theme
13. Rigor	Rigorous lesson	2. Rigorous and focused teaching in certain subjects
14. Rigorous planning	Rigorous	
15. Focus on teacher	Teacher preference	
16. Lessons	Lesson planning	
17. Focus on subjects	Focus	
18. Passion for subject	Favorite subject for teacher	
19. Passionate	Teacher's desire	
20. Strengths	Teacher preference	
21. Strong feelings	Strong passion	

In the research new legislation and the future of education in Georgia will focus on excellence and integrating rigor for all students (Georgia Department of 155 Education, 2015). Blackburn (2018) describes rigor as the environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, and is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and then demonstrate high levels of learning. With the stresses of meeting classroom standards and teachers being the expert in all subject areas, teaching with rigor plays a challenging role in today's educational system. The researcher asked teachers to share their personal experiences on how they felt about teaching standards with rigor and how they go about this in their classrooms as an elementary teacher. When it came to departmentalization and self-contained classrooms, most teachers felt the departmentalized classroom model provided teachers with the opportunity to teach more rigorously. Kelly (2018) indicated that she "taught better in a departmentalized classroom and the rigor was better." She went on to say that most teachers could teach

better and go deeper in a departmentalized classroom. Another participant, *Ellie*, described these same feelings of rigorous teaching in a departmentalized classroom:

And I'm gonna go back and say for me, in my experience, it goes back to, you know, you have teachers who are strong in areas. We have a teacher who is great in science; that's her thing, and so she teaches it with a passion and the kids get it. She's able to make it fun for them. Science is not my thing, so with me, science is gonna be boring. But with that teacher who loves science, who's teaching science, who's digging into it, she's gonna teach and they're gonna get it. And that's gonna reflect in those Milestone scores. Self-contained classes are great. You get to be with your students all day, you get to learn your students, you get to see their behaviors. You can still meet the needs of all your students in a self-contained classroom, but it's hard to dig into that subject and go real deep into it when you have to worry about other subjects as well. (Ellie, 2018)

When I asked a participant about meeting the individual needs of her students through a rigorous curriculum, she stated that she loved science and knew she could give her students the best science instruction. *Cheryl* shared the following:

For example, me with my science. Honestly, I was never a really strong science student in school. I was language arts and yet, I absolutely love teaching science to students, and my knowledge base has grown because of that. And so, I think while the academic part may not have fully been there because I enjoy the learning and the hands-on doing, that has influenced my decision. (Cheryl, 2018)

The researcher probed the participants about the Georgia Milestones test scores and how this accountability measure weighed on their decision to teach in a self-



contained or departmentalized setting. *Kelly* (2018) stated, “I would say that based on the Georgia Milestones scores that I have seen this year, they give evidence that the departmentalized setting has increased test scores.” Two participants described the way they taught in a departmentalized classroom and how they were more focused when only teaching two or three subjects. They described their classroom instruction as more rigorous and focused.

### Theme 3

Theme 3: Students developing relationships and positive behaviors with more than one teacher. RQ4: Do teachers prefer one model to another?

Table 8

#### *Categories and Common Categories Related to Theme 3*

Categories	Common categories	Theme
22. Relationships	Build relationships	3. Developing relationships with more than one teacher
23. Teams	Team building	
24. Team teaching	Teaming	
25. Personalities	Personality conflict	
26. Behavior	Behavior management	
27. Best interest	Best interest of child	
28. Different teaching styles	Whole child	

Students who are taught at the elementary level typically stay with one teacher throughout the school day. The researcher asked participants about their personal experiences and what influenced their perception. One participant shared her personal experiences with her own child and how student behaviors improve in a departmentalized classroom. She described what it was like as a parent and a teacher. According to *Ellie*,

As a parent it has, and like I said, it was just with my son, it helped him focus a little bit more, not having to sit in that same desk all day. Even if they got up and moved around in the classroom. To just get up and go to another classroom, you have different teachers with different personalities. So it kind of helps him in a sense that he kind of stayed out of trouble a little bit. He was able to stay in class more, and he was able to learn more from different teachers. (Ellie, 2018)

*Kelly* had a similar view of departmentalization as it relates to behaviors:

Departmentalization offers some benefits for some of our frequent flyer behavior students. I think it gives them an opportunity to ... a couple different things. Number one, to have a fresh start in the middle of the day. They could have been to start over and maybe have a different situation with the other teacher. And, it doesn't have to stay that way. (Kelly, 2018)

*Cheryl* also favored departmentalization over the self-contained setting:

Building positive relationships is critical. I would say the team teaching because, like I said, it's nice for them to have. Well first of all, when you team teach, they've got two advocates for them so right there, that is ... They're developing a relationship with two teachers as opposed to just one. For some students, especially in a full Title 1 school where the home life is not as traditional as we think it should be, that really ... you know, two adults; that's very supportive for them. (Cheryl, 2018)

## Theme 4

Theme 4: Meeting the social and emotional needs of the students. RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?

Table 9

### *Categories and Common Categories Related to Theme 4*

Categories	Common categories	Theme
29. Social environment	Social development	4. Meets the social and emotional needs of students
30. Positive engagement	Positive experience	
31. Social needs	Social issues	
32. Social development	Socialization	
33. Exposure	Social structure	

The significance of developing a positive classroom environment is supported by a number of social and psychological theories connected to motivation. Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and sociocultural theories were used to explore how and when students learn best (organizational structure). As part of our interview, the researcher explained Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories to each participant. I asked the participants to think about the theories and determine if these concepts had a relationship to the organizational structure of an elementary school classroom. Each participant gave me a candid answer and reflection.

Social and emotional aspects of the learning environment contribute significantly to learning. There is a level of attachment between the child and teacher; the child's attention, learning, and brain development then follow (Durlak, Weissber, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011).

*Ellie* described some of the social and emotional elements of classroom structure below:

I think when children are put into a new situation they've got to pick up on social cues. They've got to pick up on how to react to this person, what is this person expecting of me? And they need to adjust accordingly, so I think it helps them for their life experience and socialization in the future. (Ellie, 2018)

*Kelly* connected the social and emotional element to the classroom as follows:

I do think that they have to learn to adapt and conform to the setting that they are presented with. I think that that's something that follows them all the way through to adulthood. And so, learning those skills early in their educational career, help them become more successful adults. (Kelly, 2018)

*Sherry* took the following stance for departmentalization using Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories:

Yes, because when they're working in groups, they kind of socialize and figure out ways of getting answers to problems that sometimes the teacher has a hard time relaying, so when they're socializing with each other, they can teach each other how to find answers in a simpler way. I feel like departmentalization meets the social and emotional needs, because kids get to experience working with several teachers instead of working with that same teacher all day long. (Sherry, 2018)

*Elizabeth* valued the social and emotional element of any classroom structure:

I definitely do with what Vygotsky said. I think when a child is in a self-contained elementary classroom or even a class where they're departmentalized, but it's just

with maybe two teachers, which is what we have. I think that they're exposed more to the social structures that are within that day, because they're all with the same kids all day in elementary school. I definitely think that that probably promotes their learning and their social development (Elizabeth, 2018).

Vygotsky believed children's relationships with the environment were important to developing their own internal processes. Vygotsky's theories directly relate to this research study suggesting students should have different levels of ability and operate within their zone of proximal development in the classroom structure (McLeod, 2012). Piaget (1954) believed children should hypothesize their own meaning to gain understanding. Piaget's theory involves adapting instruction to meet all learners' developmental level (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2001). The teacher's role is to promote learning by providing various experiences at the developmental levels of the learners.

## **Theme 5**

Theme 5: Collaborating with teammates. RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?

Table 10

*Categories and Common Categories Related to Theme 5*

Categories	Common categories	Theme
34. Collaboration	Needs of students	5. Collaborating with teammates
35. Collaborative process	Planning with team	
36. Collaborating	Planning for students	
37. Collaborate	Team teaching	
38. Working in a team	Team building	
39. Process of collaboration	Working towards a goal	
40. Planning for collaboration	Working with team teacher	
41. Improving collaboration process		
42. Team effort		
43. Team teaching		
44. Meeting needs		

According to Slater and Ravid (2010), collaboration takes place when members of a comprehensive learning community work together as peers to support students to succeed in the classroom. This may be in the form of lesson planning or team teaching. During the interviews teachers consistently brought up collaboration and the importance of collaborating with teammates in a departmentalized and self-contained setting. When the researcher asked teachers about past experiences and their influence on their perceptions, many teachers brought up working with teachers and the importance of collaboration.

*Lindsey* described collaborating with teammates as follows:

I did a departmentalized team teaching in fifth grade with a co-worker of mine. I have a master's in math and science, and science has always kind of been my thing. When we did our team teaching experience, I taught all of the math, science and social studies. And she taught all of the reading, writing, and grammar, which

was her strength area. And it was the best teaching year I have ever had. We trusted each other completely. We worked together really, really well as far as collaborating and planning and making sure our units kind of flowed together nicely. Every student passed, it was at the time it was CRCT, every student passed the test with flying colors. And it just made for an enjoyable year because you were teaching what you wanted to teach and what you were good at teaching. And I felt like the kids got the best of both worlds. (Lindsey, 2018)

*Cheryl* described a certain comfort level necessary for collaborating with teammates:

Maybe a little, only because it goes back to that personality thing. I've team taught with different teachers at my school and it depends on your team member. I had to deep six it, for example, I had a huge success with Anginique, we did it for years, it was great. But we had both taught upper grades and so, I think that's why it worked. Then, you know, I did with Miss Ellison for a while and her experience was mainly in the primary. I got the feeling she's a little more uncomfortable with it because she was so used to self-contained. That was all her experience. (Cheryl, 2018)

Collaboration was discussed in depth in each interview, and most teachers thought communication was critical for the success of the departmentalized structure. Most teachers will share students when departmentalizing, so most thought it was important to plan and communicate together. When teachers collaborate and work together, instructional needs are met, and students are served in the highest capacity.

## Summary

The results of this study revealed that most teachers prefer teaching in a departmentalized setting in third, fourth, and fifth grade. Kelly reiterated that, “I would fully support a school’s desire to structure themselves in a departmentalized setting.” I think it benefits the students incredibly (Kelly, 2018). Teachers teaching in kindergarten, first, and second grade preferred teaching in a self-contained classroom. Six out of the 9 teachers interviewed believed that teaching in a departmentalized classroom reduced teacher workload, and students were more successful. This study also found that the data indicate that departmentalization may not be developmentally appropriate for younger children.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions on departmentalized and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. Past research suggests self-contained and departmentalized models have strengths and weaknesses, but the goal for each model is to increase student achievement (Chan & Garmen, 2004). Chapter five presents the outcomes of this study with connections to the literature reviewed in chapter two. Each theme and research question is examined thoroughly by showing its association with previous studies and/or theoretical frameworks. Additionally, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusions are included in this chapter.

#### **Discussion**

Choosing to have departmentalized or self-contained classrooms is a hard decision for any educational leader to make and can unquestionably be debated (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Administrators must consider many factors when determining the best way to organize classrooms at the elementary level. Principals and other school leaders must consider which classroom structure best suits the needs of the students in their buildings before deciding to departmentalize or remain self-contained. Not only does the principal need to have data to support the decision to departmentalize or teach in a self-contained setting, but he/she also must have teacher buy-in to implement this organizational structure effectively. Administrators must look at these two organizational structures and decide which one best fits their teachers, students, and other support staff.

A limited number of empirical studies help to determine the relationship between classroom organizational structures and student achievement (McGrath & Rust, 2002). The literature shows studies connected to elementary school classroom organizations are inconclusive and offer little guidance determining the impact of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. In the literature reviewed in chapter two, five of the studies favored departmentalization and five studies were inconclusive. Each year school leaders analyze data, conduct research, and collectively plan to ensure they are making the appropriate decision for the organization. There are many positive and negative outcomes to consider when using either classroom structure. Piaget's notion that learning should be adapted to meet the developmental needs of the learner is pertinent to the discussion of organizational structure when determining the best structure for elementary students. After a careful review of the literature, it is clear that there are advantages and disadvantages to both structures, and both ways of organizing a classroom are viable options supporting student learning.

This study was guided by four research questions.

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level?

RQ2: To what extent do the teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classes differ?

RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes?

RQ4: Do teachers prefer one model to another?

After careful analysis of the qualitative interview data gathered from participants, the findings were organized into categories, common categories, and themes. Five themes, which were described at length in chapter four, developed logically from the data.

Theme 1: Teachers as experts in certain subject areas.

Theme 2: Rigorous, focused teaching in certain subjects.

Theme 3: Developing relationships with more than one teacher.

Theme 4: Meets the social and emotional needs of students.

Theme 5: Collaborating with teammates.

Participants' actual words were used to present the reader with real perceptions from their interviews as they connect with these five themes.

Theme 1: Teachers as experts in certain subject areas. When participants spoke of teaching every subject area in a self-contained classroom, 88% teachers believed that they could not be equally proficient in teaching every subject area in the curriculum. They believed that both structures were beneficial but preferred departmentalization or teaming at the elementary level.

In a previous study, Yearwood (2001) indicated that departmentalizing provides opportunities for students to connect with several highly knowledgeable and skilled teachers who possess a vast array of knowledge, exposing them to many personalities and teaching styles (Yearwood, 2011). Departmentalized instruction was applied in the early 1920s to positively organize and prepare students for secondary education (Page, 2009). Teachers in departmentalized settings plan for fewer subject areas than do self-contained teachers. Districts are starting to departmentalize in the primary grades to meet the burdens and demands of testing accountability by providing students specified instruction

(Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). These demands of testing accountability place exceptional pressure on teachers (Anderson, 2009).

Departmentalization allows teachers to teach one specific content area focusing on specific lessons during the day (Chang, Muñoz, & Koshewa, 2008). Chan and Garmen (2004) indicated numerous positive qualities of departmentalization, such as assisting students in transitions to middle school, creating grade-level teaming, and promoting teacher retention. Past research has revealed the traditional self-contained classroom model is lacking in several of the key characteristics connected to teacher competence.

Baker (2011) emphasized many ideas and factors, which schools must contemplate to certify student success before deciding to departmentalize. Baker conducted a qualitative study which focused on 9<sup>th</sup> grade in a rural Pennsylvania district. Baker also suggested reviewing current institutional norms, interests, and knowledge of everyone involved so successful implementation of departmentalization occurs. The purpose of the study was to explore the decision-making process. Results indicated teachers enjoyed and felt more comfortable in the departmentalized setting. The information accessible to stakeholders persuaded their perceptions concerning departmentalization (Baker, 2001).

Theme 2: Rigorous focused teaching in certain subjects. The term rigor is commonly used by educators to describe educational expectations that are intellectually, academically, and educationally challenging. With the stresses of meeting classroom standards and teachers being the expert in all subject areas, teaching with rigor plays a challenging role in today's educational system. Teachers described their personal experiences and how teaching with rigor is critical at the elementary level. Most teachers

that were interviewed felt that the departmentalized classroom model provided teachers with the opportunity to teach more rigorously.

Blackburn (2018) describes rigor as the environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and then demonstrate high levels of learning. The American Association for School Administrators in 1965 announced the release of the study from 400 school systems who replied to a survey regarding departmentalization, and it was evident that teaching with rigor played a critical role. Ninety-seven of the schools were implementing the departmentalization organizational structure in elementary schools (ASSA, 1965). The information from the study included accomplishments with flexible grouping, ability grouping within grade levels, and increased rigor and knowledge of subject areas taught. This survey directly relates to the increased rigor with which teachers today are expected to teach.

Butzin, Carroll, and Lutz (2006) conducted a pilot study at South Heights Elementary School in Henderson County, Kentucky. This at-risk school was performing the lowest in the county which teachers attributed to lack of parent involvement, poverty, discipline, and staff turnover (Butzin et al., 2006). For this study, the researcher recruited three teachers to try a departmentalized approach for three classes in grades three, four, and five. The teachers agreed to teach the same subjects for the next few years. After the first year, the students were outperforming students in self-contained classrooms. At the end of the three-year pilot study, South Heights Elementary School implemented the project school-wide, and after five years of implementing departmentalization, the school

exceeded local and state expectations (Butzin, Carroll, & Lutz, 2006). In 2004, the school was recognized as a National School Change Award winner (Butzin et al., 2006, p. 368).

Theme 3: Developing relationships with more than one teacher. Participants described building student relationships as a critical aspect of teaching and acknowledged the importance of students having more than one teacher throughout the school day. One participant described students in a Title I school whose home lives were non-traditional; therefore, having supportive adults at school is essential to their success. Through departmentalization, students have the opportunity to develop positive relationships with multiple adult advocates on a daily basis.

Chan and Jarmen (2004) suggested departmentalization offers specialization and not losing instructional time by concentrating on other subject areas. Grade-level instructional teams are formed, and students are exposed to the instructional wisdom of various teachers. Departmentalization exposes students to the routine of middle school and prepares students for secondary transitions (Chan & Jarmen, 2004). Contrary to the benefits of departmentalization, Brower (1984) and Findley (1966) have noted collaboration problems occur between disciplines in the departmentalized setting and students' emotional needs are not always met.

Theme 4: Meets the social and emotional needs of students. Participants described the social and emotional needs of students and how they are affected in different classroom structures.

A look at the research regarding social and emotional needs of students brings up the theorists Piaget and Vygotsky whose studies play a significant role in understanding school structure. Developing socialization and observations are present in their work.

Piaget and Vygotsky are distinguished theorists in progressive psychology. Vygotsky highlighted the social basis throughout the period of cognitive development; Piaget described the social foundation with equilibrium concept (Hasan, 2017). Vygotsky advocated children interact in their social environment, and through language and acquisition, they can learn. Piaget supported the notion that children actively become socialized and learn to solve problems in certain social environments (Hasan, 2017).

Departmentalized and self-contained models are not the only classroom organizational structures schools use to meet the needs of their students. Classroom organization captures the structural aspects of how a teacher structures his or her classroom. There are many other types of classroom organizational practices including team teaching, co-teaching, and platooning. These models are often necessary for various reasons.

Theme 5: Collaborating with teammates. Team teaching usually involves a group of teachers working together regularly to help students learn and achieve their educational goals. The teachers work together to plan effective instruction and meet individual students' learning needs. Nickerson (2006) found the most common design of team teaching consisted of two to five teachers who have common planning during the school day, teach the same students, and share a common area within the school building. Nickerson (2006) reported team teaching has a long history in the traditional school setting and stated, "Team teaching has become an umbrella under which many differing arrangements of organizational structures and approaches to teaching have been attempted" (p. 8). Hampton (2007) found that team teaching and departmentalization

were more effective than self-contained classrooms in reading and math and recommended all principals in the district use this approach.

Co-teaching originated in the 1960's and became popularized as an example of progressive education (Antzidiamantis, 2011). Progressivism orders schools become student-centered with the curriculum and instruction designed to be child-centered and tailored to simplify the growth and raise the standards for all students. Co-teaching or partner teaching is recognized in programs meant to create reduced teacher-student ratios in the classroom. Co-teaching allows placing a large number of students in classrooms with two teachers when capacities do not warrant isolated small classes (Graue, Hatch, Rao, & Oen, 2007). These teachers share instructional responsibility for a group of students in the same classroom.

Collaboration plays a significant role in informing decisions teachers make about instruction and the way to adapt instruction to meet the needs of learners (Lai & Schildkamp, 2013). Ikemoto and Marsh (2007) use the following broad definition to describe decision-making: “teachers, principals, and administrators’ systematically collecting and analyzing data to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools” (p. 108).

The results of this study are consistent with the literature reviewed in chapter two. According to Table 1: *Studies of Classroom Organizational Structure and the Resulting Preferred Outcome* in chapter two, five researchers favored departmentalization and five researchers had inconclusive results. The participants in this study felt that departmentalization offers teachers the opportunity to be experts in their content areas, to teach rigorously on focused subjects, to develop relationships between students and



multiple teachers, to meet the social and emotional needs of students, and to collaborate in a team setting. Overall, this study would fall into the favors departmentalization category from the results given by the participants in their interviews. Many similarities between the findings of previous researchers and the findings in this research study are noted in the findings section above.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

This study examined teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. The theories chosen to guide this study were Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theories, which were used to determine teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms. The researcher elected these theorists' works to link the significance of the classroom environment to how students acquire their development of information and knowledge. The ideologies supported the research for the current study and the debate between departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. These two theorists deliberated on the setting where learning takes place, which makes their theories pertinent to the motivation of this research analysis. These theoretical frameworks were referenced when exploring how and when students learn best (organizational structure).

Vygotsky's theory backed the idea that cognitive development deeply relies on the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1935) asserted that children's learning environment and peer interaction provided a positive way to develop skills and strategies. Children develop to this level when they take part in social activities and engage in social behavior. Full growth of the zone of proximal development depends upon full social

engagement and interaction. Vygotsky's theories directly relate to this research study suggesting students should have different levels of ability and function within their zone of proximal development in the classroom structure (McLeod, 2012). Vygotsky believed children's relationships with the environment were important to developing their own internal processes.

Piaget (1954) believed children should hypothesize their own meaning to increase understanding. Piaget's theory includes adapting instruction to meet all learners' developmental level (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2001). The teacher's role is to promote learning by providing various experiences. Piaget's theory of cognitive development is of significance in association with the nature-nurture examination. Piaget explained nature played a momentous part in understanding children go through the consistent stages of cognitive development in the same sequence. Piaget also believed a child's environment significantly influences development. The importance of finding the best classroom structure to address the individual needs of learners is perilous. Piaget recommended children become socialized while growing up, but Vygotsky declared children become individuals while they are growing up (Hasan, 2017). Regardless of which theorist is correct in this argument, one assertion follows both sides: the environment a child learns in (classroom organizational structure) impacts the child's development.

Theme 4: Meeting the social and emotional needs of the students demonstrates a connection to Vygotsky's (1935) and Piaget's (1954) cognitive development theories. One of the probing research questions asked about the contextual factors that were significant to classroom organization. The importance of developing a positive

classroom environment is supported by a number of social and psychological theories connected to motivation. Piaget's (1952) constructivism theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and sociocultural theories were used to explore how and when students learn best (organizational structure). As part of the interview, the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky were explained to each participant. Each participant was asked to think about the theories and determine if these concepts had a relationship to the organizational structure of an elementary school classroom. Each participant gave a candid answer and reflection, and the majority of participants agreed that there was a direct correlation. Elizabeth's answer is to the point,

I definitely will go with what Vygotsky said. I think when a child is in a self-contained elementary classroom or even a class where they're departmentalized, but it's just with maybe two teachers, which is what we have. I think that they're exposed more to the social structures that are within that day, because they're all with the same kids all day in elementary school. I definitely think that that probably promotes their learning and their social development. (Elizabeth, 2018)

The teacher's responsibility is to promote learning by providing numerous experiences that are at the developmental levels of the learners. Vygotsky assumed children's relationships with the environment were imperative to developing their individual internal processes. Vygotsky's theories straightforwardly relate to this research study suggesting students should have different levels of ability and operate within their zone of proximal development in the classroom structure (McLeod, 2012). Piaget (1954) believed children should hypothesize their own meaning to gain understanding. Piaget's

theory involves adapting instruction to meet all learners' developmental level (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2001).

### **Implications for Practice**

This study has positive implications for change at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. Self-contained and departmentalized classrooms have been a major topic of discussion for years. Elementary teachers and students in grades three through eight are under enormous accountability pressure to pass mandated tests, which guides the current movement in education (Anderson, 2009). Administrators are continuously seeking ways to meet the needs of teachers who are feeling the pressures of the accountability movement. By examining organizational structure, educators and administrators gained a new understanding of the needs of teachers and how to better meet those needs.

Through participation in this study, the participants are now more aware of their own perceptions regarding organizational structure. During the busy life of an educator, it is rare that there is time for careful reflection on topics that seem inflexible at the school level. This study allowed participants the chance to reflect on their own practice and make recommendations for improvements. These teachers are now more aware of their needs related to organizational structure, and the results of this study can give them the needed evidence to start a dialogue with their administration about the classroom organizational structures at their schools. Many participants indicated that teachers feel an enormous amount of stress and pressure teaching all subject areas. It seems that teacher burnout intensifies over time because of persistent stress in the work environment. These are valid concerns that can be brought to the attention of the

participants' administrators. It is also beneficial to the individual participants to simply be aware of their own perceptions to help them understand their frustrations and work through them.

At the organizational level, principals and other educational decision-makers benefit from the results of this study. Teachers who participated in this study felt that principals are open to the suggestions of having departmentalized classrooms or self-contained classrooms. It was not discussed how the organization of this process works, but it was understood that most principals were supportive and understanding of the classroom teachers' desires. The principals were also open to discussion and ideas for deciding classroom organizational structure. Administrators can take away from this study that teachers value leaders who listen to their opinions and needs. Because teachers carry out the self-contained or departmentalized models, they are the experts at what works well and what does not work. Their voices should be valued and taken into careful consideration when making organizational changes and decisions at the school level. Another implication was that the data collected for this study could provide specific topics of interest for administrators and their decision-making process. The themes presented in this research study can be topics of reflection for administrators as they make determinations about how to structure certain grade levels in their elementary school settings. Administrators would benefit from thinking about teachers as experts in certain subject areas; rigorous, focused teaching in certain subjects; developing relationships with more than one teacher; meeting the social and emotional needs of students; and collaboration among teammates.

These themes could also guide future professional learning workshops at the school level where teachers could learn more about what the research suggests about self-contained and departmentalized organizational structures. Additionally, it would be beneficial to replicate this study in another school system with a different population and different geographic location to see if the results are consistent. It would be worthwhile to examine the themes that emerge from another population to see if the themes that developed here are similar to those in other places with different educators. Comparing and contrasting the themes would give room for further conclusions to be drawn about schools across the country and their various teacher perceptions.

At the societal level, the results of this study are pertinent to the current climate in the United States of teacher dissatisfaction and protest. Teachers all over America are standing up, walking out, and voicing their opinions loudly and clearly. The participants in this study are not among these groups of teachers across the country who are protesting their unfair treatment in the workplace. On the contrary, most of the teachers in this study feel that their administrators listen to their voices and value their opinions.

Administrators and educational leaders across the United States would benefit from heeding the implications of this study. Teachers are a powerful force when they are united, and they appreciate being valued and respected. We as a society would do well to value our educators and listen to their perspectives. As a society we have shifted away from valuing the opinions of our educators. In decades past, educators were seen as the authority in the classroom to be respected and never questioned. Now, the pendulum has shifted to disrespect and distrust of teachers. Parents and society as a whole second guess teachers' decision-making and often target them with allegations when something goes

wrong in the classroom. This study reinforces what good administrators already know, teachers are the experts in the classroom and should be treated as such. They deserve the respect that other professionals earn by going through rigorous training programs and difficult credentialing assessments. Teachers are professionals, and their perceptions and opinions should be valued at the school, state, and federal levels.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms would extend the results of this study. Since the majority of teachers believed that departmentalization was the best way to teach, additional research is needed to particularly examine departmentalization. A comprehensive qualitative study that investigates not only the teachers' perceptions but also the perceptions of parents and students would be enlightening. It would be interesting to see if parent, student, and teacher perceptions are in line with one another or very different. To achieve this type of data collection, parent and student satisfaction surveys would be necessary along with teacher interviews or surveys. Allowing parents and students to voice their perceptions and opinions would give great insight on how classroom organizational structure is perceived. This feedback would help parents contribute positively to their child's education and would provide useful insight that oftentimes would go unnoticed. This study would be beneficial to the extension of this current research study. Also, asking parents their views on school issues improves communication and can assist the school in numerous ways such as building positive relationships between school and home. Parents who provided feedback on how their child learns best are more likely to understand and support the unique approaches

the school may be delivering. This would promote a more positive educational environment for parents, students, and teachers.

In addition to a qualitative exploration of parent, teacher, and student perceptions, it would also be worthwhile to consider a quantitative examination of test scores and organizational structure. A comparison of test scores from the same students that were taught in a self-contained classroom one year and then the following year were taught in a departmentalized classroom would make an interesting investigation. The test scores could be used by administrators for a variety of purposes. It would be interesting to see the trends in the data and focus on individual teachers score reports and whether they were teaching a subject they were an expert in. This type of data could allow for more concrete conclusions to be drawn about the effectiveness of the self-contained and departmentalized models at different grade levels.

In addition to these two new study proposals, it would also be useful to repeat this current investigation five years from now to see how perspectives differ or stay the same. Data collection over time emboldens the results and makes them more meaningful to the world of education.

### **Dissemination**

A teacher's perception on classroom organizational structure is always going to be a contentious issue. Teachers want to be involved in the decision-making process about how they are going to teach each school year. There needs to be a recognition that administrators want to do their best and collaborate with teachers to make the best education decisions for their schools. To assist administrators on teacher perceptions of



classroom organization, the researcher plans to conduct some one-on-one individual discussions for principals to share with them the teachers' perceptions.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Participants from this study offered significant perceptions on self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. The teachers felt that teachers should teach in an area they are an expert in, rigorous teaching was critical, developing relationships with more than one teacher is imperative, understanding the social and emotional needs of the child is critical, and collaborating with teammates was essential for departmentalization to be successful. The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions. RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions on self-contained classes as compared to departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level? RQ2: To what extent do the teachers' perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classes differ? RQ3: What are the contextual factors that are important when moving from self-contained to departmentalized classes? RQ4: Do teachers prefer one model to another?

After assembling the proper data to answer the research questions, it was determined that most teachers prefer a departmentalized or team teaching classroom setting. Teachers continually expressed their desire to work in collaboration with a partner and how the workload is almost unbearable for teachers at the elementary level when teaching all subject areas. It was also made clear when assembling the literature review that there is little past research on classroom organization structure and many inconsistencies within the research. The need for more consistent findings is evidence; however, the researcher believes that this study will assist principals in the decision to have self-contained or departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level.

The data collected in this study also showed that teachers who were teaching in their subject preference were happier and less stressed. Principals must make some compromises for the school to accommodate each teacher's preferences. As an administrator in an elementary school and someone who helps make the schedule and the classes each school year, I realize how valuable teacher input is and how important it is that their voices be heard. In the future I hope to establish a school culture where teachers have a voice and are heard in the decision-making process.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Grand Tour Question:

1. Please share your thoughts on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level.

Past Experiences in Relation to this Topic:

2. Have any past experiences influenced your perception of departmentalization or self-contained classrooms at the elementary level?

Conceptual Lens in Relation to this Topic:

3. Do you prefer teaching in a self-contained classroom or a departmentalized classroom and why?

4. Have the Georgia Milestones scores affected your decision on organizational structure at the elementary level?

5. Which organizational structure do you feel best meets the social and emotional needs of the Whole Child and why?

6. Have your administrations perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms influenced your decision of organizational structure at the elementary level?

7. Have your students' perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms influenced your decision of organizational structure at the elementary level?

8. Have your students' parents' perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms influenced your decision of organizational structure at the elementary level?

Please explain.

9. Vygotsky advocated that children interact in their social environment, and through language and acquisition they can learn. Piaget supported the notion that children actively

become socialized and learn to solve problems in certain social environments. Do you believe this theory has a relationship to the organizational structure of an elementary school? Please explain.

10. The scholar academic ideology stresses the importance of students gaining subject matter knowledge from experts in each subject area; whereas, the learner-centered ideology stresses the importance of meeting the needs and interests of individual learners and giving them opportunities to exercise personal choice. Do you believe either concept has a relationship to the organizational structure of an elementary school?

Closing Question:

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX B: OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
DR. MARK SCOTT

BOARD MEMBERS  
MR. FRED WILSON, CHAIRMAN

HELEN HUGHES, VICE CHAIRMAN  
LORI JOHNSON  
DR. RICK UNRUH

DAVE CROCKETT  
HOKE MORROW  
BRYAN UPSHAW

DATE: April 20, 2018

TO: Dana Wiggins  
Quail Run Elementary School

FROM: Sharon Moore  
Director of Professional Learning

SUBJECT: **RESEARCH APPROVAL REQUEST**

Your request to conduct research for your graduate program at Columbus State University is approved. The purpose of your research study, "Teacher Perceptions of Self-Contained and Departmentalized Classrooms at the Elementary Level", is to investigate the extent to which teachers perceive departmentalized and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level and to determine what type of classroom organizational structure teachers believe is best for students to raise academic achievement. The timeframe for this research study is one year from the date of system approval.

Thank you for submitting your IRB, research questions, consent form, and the principal approval letters.

Please keep in mind that you will be responsible for compiling the data for your research. The staff at Quail Run Elementary School, Russell Elementary School, and the Departments of Assessment & Accountability and Technology Services is unable to compile data for your research. Board policy also prohibits the use of system email for personal research. Please also remember student and teacher anonymity is of utmost priority for this research project.

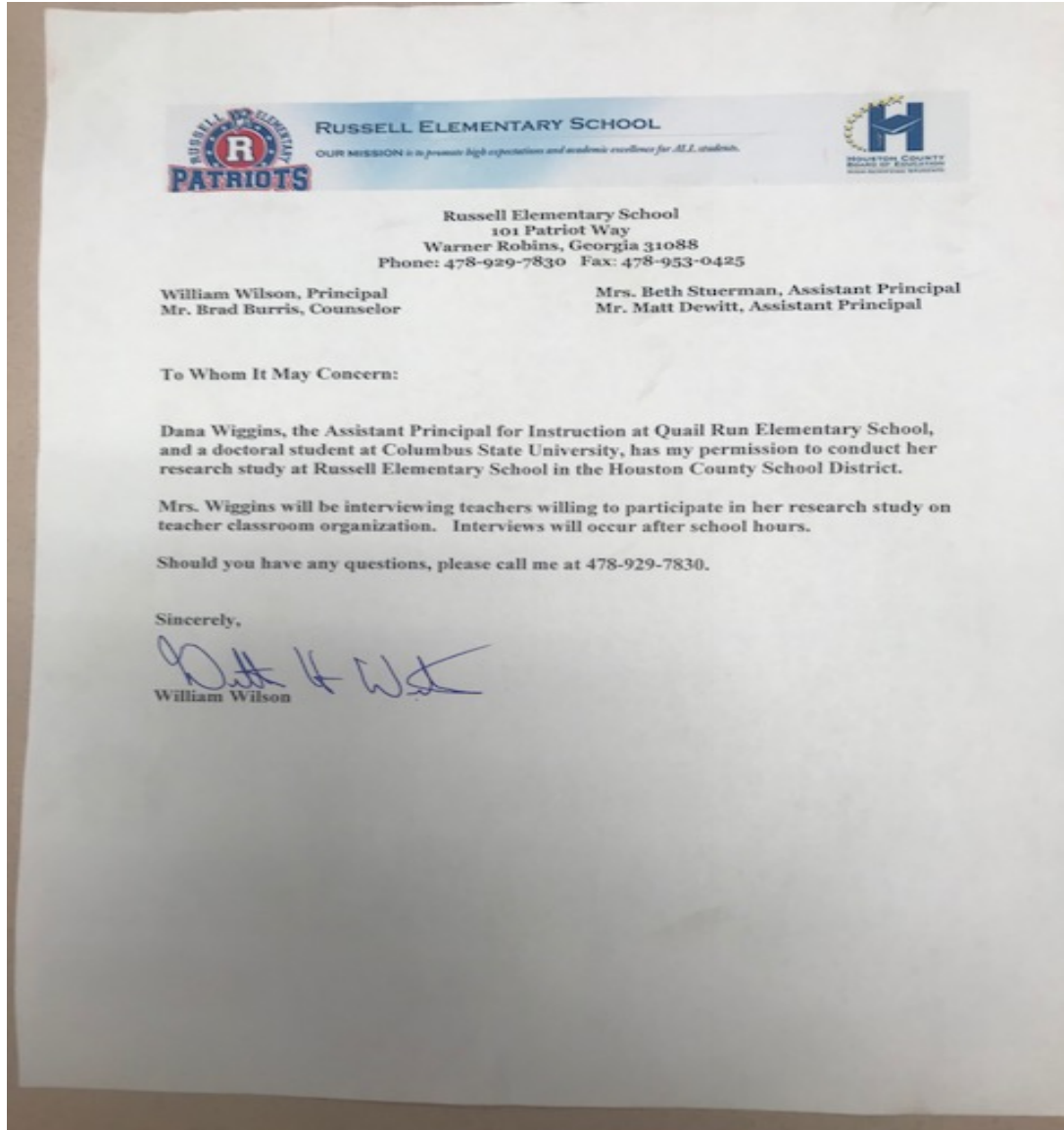
I have attached to this approval e-mail the Houston County Schools Requirements for Conducting Research.

I wish you the best as you work toward earning your graduate degree. Please let me know if I may be of any assistance to you again in the future.

cc: Cindy Flesher  
Cheryl Thomas  
William Wilson

P.O. Box 1850 • PERRY, GEORGIA 31069  
(478) 988-6200 • FAX (478) 988-6259  
WWW.HCBE.NET

APPENDIX C: REQUEST TO THE PRINCIPAL OF THE SELECTED SCHOOL TO  
GET CONSENT FOR THE PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY



## APPENDIX D: INVITATION AND PROCEDURES

### (a) A FORMAL WRITTEN INVITATION TO TEACHERS WHO ARE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Dear Teacher,

My name is Dana Wiggins and I am a doctoral candidate at Columbus State University in the Department of counseling and Foundations and Leadership.

I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to participate in a research study if you have taught in a self-contained and a departmentalized classroom.

To collect data for this study, I will be conducting individual interviews either in person or via telephone after school hours. The time and location for the interviews will be at your convenience. Interviews will last approximately 30 - 60 minutes and will consist of questions related to your perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level.

Interviews will be recorded using a password-protected device. The interview will be transcribed and responses will be kept confidential. Nothing you say will be attributed directly to you.

In addition, this research study has been approved by the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations.

If you are willing to participate in this research study, please email me at [wiggins\\_dana@columbusstate.edu](mailto:wiggins_dana@columbusstate.edu) or call me at 478-542-4184. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign and date the Consent Form; I will need to collect the form prior to the interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dana Wiggins

Doctoral Student

Columbus State University



(b) notification to the participants of the procedures and purpose of the study including a guarantee of the confidentiality of their participation



You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Dana Wiggins, a student in the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Columbus State University. Dr. Tom Hackett is supervising this study.

**I. Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of teachers perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level.

**II. Procedures:**

The researcher will obtain a consent form from all participants who agree to participate in an individual interview. Participants will not be identified and interview responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will contact the participants to establish a date and time for the interview. The interview session will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The participants will be asked questions about their perceptions regarding self-contained and departmentalized classes. Interviews will be recorded using a password-protected device. The interview will be transcribed and responses will be kept confidential. There is a possibility that this research will be utilized in future research projects.

**III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:**

There are no possible risks involved in this research study. The researcher will minimize discomfort by assuring anonymity and confidentiality to the participant. The participant may feel discomfort in answering some of the interview questions for fear of their employer knowing their thoughts and perceptions. Interview responses will be kept confidential by the researcher. This data may be used for future studies.

**IV. Potential Benefits:**

The participant may be benefited through the research study. Information from the study may provide teachers and educational leaders insight on classroom organization to increase student achievement.

**V. Costs and Compensation:**

[In lay terminology, list any compensation that participants will receive and/or any costs for participating. Clearly state if there is no compensation for the participants.] A small token of appreciation will be given to each participant in the form of a gift card.

## **VI. Confidentiality:**

All data will be password protected and responses will not be linked to the participants.

## **VII. Withdrawal:**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, and withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, [name of principal investigator] at [telephone number] or [CSU e-mail address]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu).

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project. [If participation is dependent upon the participant being 18 years of age or older, you must include a statement here confirming the age.]

---

Signature of Participant/Date

## APPENDIX E: EMAIL TO TEACHERS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the Assistant Principal for Instruction at Quail Run Elementary School, and a doctoral student at Columbus State University, I am doing a qualitative research study on self-contained and departmentalized classrooms at the elementary level. As part of this program I will be conducting a qualitative research study to learn more about teacher perceptions on this topic. If you participate in this study I will ask you to join me for an interview to talk about your experiences as a teacher and your experience in a self-contained and departmentalized classroom.

This research study will be completely confidential and you will be given the opportunity to read the interview transcriptions for accuracy after the interview is complete.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. If you are willing to participate in my study please email me at [wiggins\\_dana@columbusstate.edu](mailto:wiggins_dana@columbusstate.edu)

Thank you in advance!

Dana Wiggins  
Assistant Principal for Instruction  
Quail Run Elementary School

Ps. I will be giving a small token of appreciation as a way of saying thanks.

Should you have any questions, please call me at 478-542-4184.