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## Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of Departmentalization in Elementary Schools

Mary Day  
mary.cunningham@lmunet.edu

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**TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
DEPARMENTALIZATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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Mary Day

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair


10/3/19  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member

10/3/19  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member

10/3/19  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
EdD Program Director

10/3/19  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean, School of Education

10/13/19  
Date

**TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
DEPARTMENTALIZATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

**Dissertation**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Carter and Moyers School of Education  
at Lincoln Memorial University**

**by**

**Mary Elizabeth Day**

**October 2019**

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**Mary E. Day**

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## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge Jesus Christ for allowing me to accomplish something I could have never completed without Him. I would like to thank my husband, Jacob, for loving me through the difficult days and making me laugh on the good ones. My favorite memories are those I have shared with you.

I would like to dedicate this work to the two individuals who would be among the most proud if they were here, my father and Papa. I would like to thank my mother, my best friend, for the encouragement to always love what I do. I owe all that I have become to you. To my brother, thank you for the unconditional love, laughs, and life we have shared together. You will always hold a special place in my heart. To my nana, the world is a brighter place to live in because of you. Your kindness to everyone is contagious, and I know this means so much to you. Your girl finally did it!

I would like to thank my L.M.U. professors who have had a part in developing who I am as an educator. I have been blessed with working under the absolute best. Because of you, I have built an everlasting understanding that I should strive for excellence in everything I do. Lastly, I would like to thank my church family at First Baptist Church of Cumberland Gap who have been my prayer warriors as I have completed this journey. I am proud to be surrounded by others who love the Lord and learning just as much as I do.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine administrator and teacher perceptions of the two primary classroom organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade within a rural East Tennessee school district: 1) departmentalized and 2) self-contained. Data were collected from seven elementary schools. The number of survey respondents were: 25 kindergarten through second grade teachers and eight administrators represented a 63% return rate for teachers and an 80% return rate for administrators. This researcher determined three primary categories among the administrator and teacher responses from both organizational structures: 1) student and teacher relationships, 2) classroom transition, and 3) academic planning. This researcher also determined there were advantages and disadvantages to both organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade. This researcher's findings from administrator and teacher participants under both organizational structures were consistent with each other.

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*“The cherished image of the traditional elementary school with its self-contained classrooms and solitary teachers is disappearing. In its place is a much more complex and complicated organization involving more team teaching and team planning, greater reliance on specialists, and variable schedules dictated by student needs” (Duke, 2006, p. 27).*

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

As school accountability increased, educators and administrators were continuously pressured for increased academic achievement (Aliakbari & Nejad, 2013; Baker, 2011). As education evolved, school systems across the United States sought out innovative ways to enhance student achievement (Almon & Feng, 2012). Students’ academic achievement outcomes were directly influenced by the organizational structure of a school (“A School's Organizational Structure and Students' Mathematics Achievements,” 2014). Therefore, increased standards and rising accountability for teachers led school systems to experiment with the way elementary schools are organized (Anderson, 2009; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Merenbloom & Kalina, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers held the ultimate responsibility of the level of academic growth that occurred during the time students were present in the classroom (Anderson, 2015). As educational reform continued to bring about more changes, elementary schools began to restructure the way classrooms were organized to increase student achievement (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). Academic achievement was defined as “performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has

accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments” (“Oxford Bibliographies,” 2018, para. 3). Student achievement was most often measured by test results evaluating students’ academic growth (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). Vanderhaar et al. (2006) “found teachers’ average years of teaching experience, combined with student poverty levels and previous testing results, were the best indicators of student achievement” (as cited in Minott, 2006, p. 32). Increased demands on teachers led educators to experiment with non-traditional classroom organizational structures to increase student achievement (Aliakbari & Nejad, 2013). Departmentalization was referred to as a qualified teacher who provided instruction on a single subject to several groups of students throughout the school day and was among the most popular non-traditional classroom organizational structures (Baker, 2011).

Departmentalization was popularized as an organizational structure after the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required schools to increase test scores and close the existing achievement gap in the United States (Almon & Feng, 2012; Gewerts, 2014; Minott, 2016). An achievement gap was defined as the “disparity in academic performance between groups of students” (Education Week, 2011, para. 1). NCLB, later known as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), required all states to meet Federal Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). The reauthorization of NCLB increased the amount of state testing and increased accountability on teachers and schools to improve student performance. Although, testing brought added pressure to teachers, state lawmakers continued to believe statewide-testing was the most

reliable measure to evaluate teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). Schools that failed to meet student growth faced teacher job termination, an increase in the length of the school day/year, parental choice, and restructuring of the school system. School systems have often experimented with organizational structure to close the achievement gap among all students which allowed teachers the opportunities to be more effective in the classroom.

Chang, Muñoz, and Koshewa (2008) and Baker (2011) claimed little research has been conducted on the departmentalized structure at the elementary level. Although little research existed on departmentalization at the kindergarten through second grade level, it became a more popular experimented organizational structure among early elementary teachers (Baker, 2011). Many elementary schools have experimented with the departmentalized structure, though evidence supporting academic achievement among elementary students was lacking and the results were inconclusive (ASCD, 2011; Glennon, Hinton, Callahan, Kurt, & Fischer, 2013; Liu, 2011; Minott, 2016; Ornstein, 2011; Strohl et al., 2014). Liu (2011) emphasized the importance of expanding the research field on departmentalization and the self-contained classroom and provided future elementary teachers, administrators, and researchers with the understanding of challenges faced in elementary school surrounding organizational structure. This researcher's review of relevant literature concerning the ideal organizational structure for elementary schools has provided little empirical evidence and findings. Extant literature on the topic contained speculative evidence and lacked

support for either the departmentalized or the self-contained structure in elementary school (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Chang et al., 2008; Goldhaber, Cowan, & Walch, 2012; Hood, 2010; Isenberg, Teh, & Walsh, 2013). The purpose of this study was to expand the existing body of literature comparing teachers' and administrators' perceptions on the departmentalized and the self-contained organizational structure specifically in kindergarten through second grade classrooms in a rural East Tennessee school district.

### **Research Questions**

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators of the two primary organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade classrooms in a rural East Tennessee school district: departmentalized and self-contained. The following research questions were developed to guide the research for this study:

**Research question 1.** What were the reported perceptions of the administrators within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

**Research question 2.** What were the reported perceptions of the teachers within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

**Research question 3.** What were the reported perceptions of the administrators within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages

and disadvantages of the departmentalized classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

**Research question 4.** What were the reported perceptions of the teachers within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

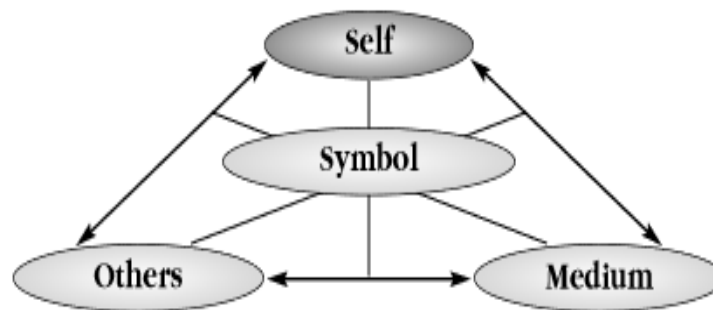
### **Theoretical Framework**

Constructivism and social constructivism were the primary theories that served as a foundation for this research study. Both theories emphasized the importance of a classroom organizational structure and how it is related to student academic achievement. The researcher chose to base the study on constructivism because of the impact constructivism had in the development of a young child. Social constructivism was chosen because of the emphasis placed on interactions between a student and an early childhood educator and how the interactions related to a student's overall academic growth and achievement in the early elementary grade levels. The following framework served as a representation of how constructivism and social constructivism related to classroom organizational structure, and which environment was most ideal for elementary students.

**Constructivist Theory.** Constructivism was defined as a cognitive theory of development and learning based on the ideas of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky. Constructivism was defined in terms of the individuals organizing, structuring, and restructuring of experience--an ongoing lifelong process--in accordance with existing schemes of thought. Constructivism was the process of



knowledge being constructed by the student (learner) (Beck & Cosnick, 2006; Bingham, 2011). Woolfork (1993) defined constructivism as teaching models that “[emphasized] the creation of environments in which students can develop their understandings of the content and become more independent, self-regulated learners in the process” (p. 499).



*Figure 1. Constructivist Learning Model (source: Fosnot 1996)*

Bingham (2011) argued students created knowledge and understanding based on the student’s own experiences in and outside of the classroom, leaving teachers to have little to do with students constructing knowledge. In the case of constructivism, teachers existed as a guide on the side, and served as a facilitator of every child’s academic success (see Figure 6). Woolfork (1993) further defined constructivism under two primary ideas of thought: 1) “students actively [constructed] their own knowledge and the mind of the student mediates inputs from the outside world to determine what the student will learn” (p. 485). Woolfork (1993) determined under the constructivism theory, students actively partook in the learning process, and were guided by those individuals around them, such as teachers and other influential role models.

The constructivist theory provided individual students the opportunities and experiences to build on the student's own knowledge with the guidance and support from teachers and other student peers in the classroom. Lambert et al. (2002) explained under the constructivist model, teachers offered experiences to students to actively participate in the student's own learning. Teachers activating students' prior knowledge to build on the current existing level of schema ultimately accomplished this. The primary role of the teacher under the constructivist model was to allow opportunities for students to make real-world connections with what the students already know, to ultimately build more knowledge and understanding for each student. According to Chan et al. (2008), the constructivist theory was ideal under the self-contained organizational structure, as the students stay with one general education teacher for most of the day. Under the self-contained model, teachers formed stronger relationships with students, and allowed for optimal development of the students' knowledge and experiences (Lee et al., 2016). Patton (2003) determined teachers who had the same students all day were able to better identify the students who may have struggles that stem from home. Baker (2011) confirmed, under the constructivist theory, teachers allowed students more "opportunities to guide and support their students' emotional and psychological development" (p. 26).

**Social Constructivist Theory.** Vygotsky (1978) and Yearwood (2011) agreed that socialization was one of the guiding principles of early student development. Vygotsky (1978) argued the individuals around a student, impacted the student's beliefs and helped build a student's knowledge and understanding.

The framework that guided Vygotsky's work was the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1978) believed students existed in an area of development that with the help of a capable and more knowledgeable other (MKO), students began to make meaning, build on prior knowledge, and make connections. In this zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1978) believed the difference between what a student can accomplish on his or her own, and what the same student can accomplish with a more knowledgeable, socially supportive individual guided the student to deeper understanding. Vygotsky (1978) theorized students should be placed in classroom settings where opportunities are given for exploration, which allowed teachers (and sometimes other peers) to act only as a guide and support for the student. However, to offer students the opportunities to engage in his or her zone of proximal development, teachers allowed for more than an environment arrangement (Lee et al., 2016). Teachers should have provided opportunities for exploration, explanations, demonstrations, and cooperative learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) argued social interactions was a primary factor in students' cognitive development in the elementary school years. The departmentalized organizational structure allowed for the type of social interactions with peers Vygotsky desired for students (Lee et al., 2016). Reed (2002) determined the departmentalized organizational structure allowed students more opportunities to interact with his or her teachers and peers. Therefore, students were also able to enhance interpersonal skills by getting familiar with a multitude of teaching styles. Yearwood (2011) argued "high-quality interactions

with adults promote self-regulated learning in students” (p. 33). According to Page (2009) and Yearwood (2011), teachers of departmentalized structures allowed for students to have such opportunities with teachers. Page (2009) and Yearwood (2011) found under the departmentalized structure, teachers taught content-specific material, increased teacher knowledge, and allowed for more high-quality learning opportunities for students.

### **Significance of the Project**

At the time of this study, there was a lack of literature that existed concerning research on the most ideal organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade schools. The extant research on departmentalization in elementary schools did not adequately inform individuals the advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained and departmentalized classroom in kindergarten through second grade. This researcher addressed advantages and disadvantages of both organizational structures specifically in kindergarten through second grade in a rural public-school setting. This researcher desired to further expand extant literature on the organizational structures in elementary schools and address the gap that existed concerning the subject. Individuals interested in researching organizational structures, specifically in kindergarten through second grade, were further educated from this study. Through the research, individuals in the field of education and those interested in how young students learn best benefitted from what perceptions existed by administrators and teachers under both types of organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade classrooms found in rural settings. It was necessary to collect data

from administrators and teachers to better understand how administrators and teachers respond under different types of organizational structures. School leaders also benefitted from this research to better understand the practice of organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade.

### **Definition of the Terms**

**Ability-grouping.** Ability-grouping was defined as tracking or placing “students into groups based on their academic achievement or ability” (Maresca, 2004, p. 10).

**Academic achievement.** Academic achievement was defined as the measurement in academic performance or success among students on end of course state testing (Ed.Week, 2011, para. 1).

**Departmentalization (Traditional).** Departmentalization was defined as students primarily taught by two or more teachers for core subject areas. Departmentalization allowed teachers to specialize in specific content areas (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Delviscio & Muffs, 2007; Johnson, 2013). Under the departmentalized structure, many school systems assigned one teacher to lead instruction in math and science, while another is assigned to teach reading and social studies (Gewerts, 2014). Other administrators have experimented with students switching between up to four teachers, whereas there is one primary teacher for each core subject.

**Organizational change.** Organizational change was defined as the change that occurred “as the result of processes that make organizations more

similar without necessarily making them more efficient” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 147).

**Professional Learning Communities (PLC).** PLCs were defined as a group of educators gathered to collaboratively plan, share ideas, and construct new ideas and meaning about teaching and learning (Little, 2003). Professional learning communities differed from collaborative planning, as professional learning communities are often a much broader group of individuals and do not necessarily teach the same grade or the same subject. The focus of a professional learning communities can be anything that involves education.

**Self-contained (Traditional).** Self-contained was defined as one teacher being responsible for all core subjects for the same group of students daily (Johnson, 2013).

**Student engagement.** Three categories of student engagement were considered to better define the term. Behavioral engagement reviewed engagement through rule and direction following; emotional engagement looked at student interest and value levels; and cognitive engagement looked at student effort and motivation (Fredericks et al., 2004; NCSE, 2006).

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

According to Yearwood (2011), the main purpose of the school system was to transfer knowledge to students. According to Cooper and Scott (2016), being a teacher was purposeful and to be deemed effective, one must “create environments and plan [instruction] to maximize the probability of student success” (p. 10). Elementary school was defined as a “safe, secure environment where one classroom teacher is responsible for coordinating the learning experience of one class of students” (Merenbloom & Kalina, 2007, p. 3). Many educators argued the elementary years were the foundation in which students developed their attitudes toward school and learning (Chang et al., 2008). Merenbloom and Kalina (2007) reported there was a gap in student academic success among elementary students from different socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, nationalities, and genders leading school systems across the United States to experiment with school organizational structure. Educators have debated the most ideal organizational structure for elementary school for the past century (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018; Franklin & Johnson, 1967; Gibbs & Matala, 1962; Lamme, 1976; Liu, 2011; McGrath & Rust, 2002; Otto & Sanders, 1964; Slavin, 1986).

There are two primary organizational structures that have been the most common in elementary classrooms in the United States. A classroom was defined as one of two categories: a) self-contained, defined as “a generalist teacher [who provided] instruction on all subjects to one set of students,” or b) departmentalized, defined as “a specialist teacher [provided] instruction on a specific subject” to several groups of students throughout the school day”

(Baroody, 2017, p. 314). Under the self-contained structure, the classroom model was relatively not reflected on by anyone but the individual teacher of the classroom (Aliakbari & Nejad, 2013; Baker, 2011). Under this type of structure, many classroom teachers are inclined to try an alternative classroom organizational structure (Aliakbari & Nejad, 2013). Departmentalization, unlike the self-contained structure, allowed students the opportunity of having instruction led by multiple content-specialized teachers (Minott, 2016). According to many researchers, any other structures besides the self-contained model in its purest form, was a step in the direction of a departmentalized structure (Franklin & Johnson, 1967; Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967). During the time of this study, according to Des Moines Public School system, many schools are under the self-contained model, however still have special activity classes under a departmentalized structure (Baker, 2011; Des Moines, 1989).

### **History of Elementary Classroom Organizational Structure**

Rydeen (2007) argued educators have debated school organizational structures since the early 1800s. However, educators have experimented with organizational structures in elementary schools since 1789, with the creation of reading and writing schools in Boston, Massachusetts (Baker, 2011). During the beginning of the 19th century, classrooms were set up with one general teacher teaching all students, usually five through 15 years of age, and the teacher worked with students in smaller groups of students who were around the same learning ability and age (Rydeen, 2007). According to Roland (2018), Joseph Lancasterian (1778-1838) developed the Lancasterian School system. The Lancasterian School system was created “as a result of urbanization and lasted until about 1840”



(Rydeen, 2007, p. 45). According to Roland (2018), under the Lancasterian system, more advanced students taught the below average students. Lancasterian was highly influential in the creation of adapting the way teachers grouped students by age when using the lecture method (Roland, 2018). The lecture method later was deemed by educators to be the most popular teaching method by such educators as Horace Mann and Frederick Taylor. One of the most memorable and withstanding characteristics from the Lancasterian School system was large (or whole-group) instruction (Rydeen, 2007).

According to Rydeen (2007), between 1840-1850, the Transitional School was in practice and unified reading and writing as one subject and created smaller classrooms to allow for more individualized instruction. The Boston Quincy Grammar School, founded in 1845, was the first graded public school (Abrams & Madaus, 2003; Rydeen, 2007). The Quincy Grammar School had 12 classrooms each with one generalist teacher (Otto & Sanders, 1964; Rydeen, 2007). The schools were also the first to replace traditional oral exams with standardized writing exams (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). By the 1860's, mostly all classes and teachers were graded, and this continued to be the predominant organizational structure (Baker, 2011; Franklin & Johnson, 1967). The individuals who created this self-contained organizational structure estimated the American school would use this same organizational structure for around the next 70 years (Baker, 2011; Rydeen, 2007).

In the 1990's, state lawmakers placed even more emphasis on test results and led to standards-based reform in the United States (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). By this time, every state, except Iowa, had a standards-based testing

accountability program (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). During the 1930's, educators experimented with the departmentalized vs. self-contained organizational structures. The 1940's presented a decline in educators choosing the departmentalized structure. According to the American Association of School Administrators (1965), some elementary administrators experimented using the departmentalized structure. During the mid-20th century, the self-contained classroom structure remained the most widely used and popular among elementary classrooms to the 1990's (Baker, 2011; Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967). According to Tillman (1960), the self-contained organizational structure was a direct outcome of the human growth and development during the time. During the 1940's, experimentation with different organizational structures in elementary schools was especially popular in the United States. Experimenting educators led to more teachers eager to move towards the departmentalized organizational structure (Dunn, 1952; Lobdell, 1963; Otto & Sanders, 1964). According to Dunn (1952), "by 1945, the total number of subjects and areas of special emphasis in elementary schools had reached 24" (p. 202). However, according to Lobdell (1963), more schools were reported as giving up the departmentalized structure than adopting it.

According to Mohl (1975), William A. Wirt, the superintendent of schools in Gary, Indiana, initiated classes divided by content area into *platoons* (Baker, 2011). Wirt's model became popularly known as the Platoon School Plan (Mohl, 1975). The purpose of departmentalization, according to Wirt, was for schools to be independent and self-sufficient (Walters, 1970). Students were divided into two groups, and while one group was focused on content, the other groups of

students attended specialized activities such as music, art, and drama (Baker, 2011). More emphasis was placed on students learning trade skills, as opposed to content specialties (Mohl, 1975). Teachers taught woodworking, crafts, automotive skills, arts, music, dancing, and labor work. As described by Mohl (1975), the departmentalized structure of the time, prepared students for the future and taught students what they would need to succeed in their chosen occupations during the 1970s. Alice Barrows, secretary of Wirt during Wirt's time heading the U.S. Department of Education under President Franklin Roosevelt, was among those who advocated for the Platoon Plan. Barrows believed students who were taught under a departmentalized structure would reap multiple educational benefits from the experience and receive the necessary training and skills to succeed in their chosen occupation (Baker, 2011; Mohl, 1975). Of these benefits, Barrows felt the most beneficial was the balance of work, play, and study (Mohl, 1972). As education became of more interest to the public, teachers felt pressured to expand their areas of knowledge in the classroom, shifting the debate from content knowledge to what is the best organizational method for elementary schools (Anderson, 1966; Franklin & Johnson, 1967; Morrison, 1968). It was not long before educators realized the importance of specialization as young as seventh and eighth grade, which paved the way for departmentalization to be born in the upper elementary classrooms (Baker, 2011; Liu, 2011). During this time of change in the upper elementary grades, early elementary classrooms remained virtually unchanged as educators continued to use the traditional structure of one general teacher being responsible for teaching all subjects in one-room to a set of students (Spring, 2001). Tillman (1960) argued the full potential of the self-

contained model had yet to be reached. By the 1960's, the organizational structure continued to be a familiar debate among educators (Tillman, 1960). According to Hood (2010) not much changed in elementary schools, which predominantly continued to be used in the self-contained organizational structure.

### **Role of the Elementary School Teacher**

Elementary school teachers are trained to be generalists who teach every subject to one group of students for an entire academic year (Andrews, 2006; Hood, 2010). Chang et al. (2008) argued students built a connection to school by first forming strong relationships with his or her teacher(s). Donelan-McCall and Dunn (2007) reported students in first grade were shown to have strong, and often negative, feelings toward school. These negative feelings stemmed from multiple challenges students experience during their first years beginning school (Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 2007). According to Donelan-McCall and Dunn (2007), students are required to become adjusted to a new environment, familiar with increased academic demands, and create relationships with teachers and other peers.

The role of a teacher was ever changing as more demand was placed on the individual (Aliakbari & Nejad, 2013; Valli & Buese, 2007). The pressure on teachers continually increased, specifically, since the creation and ratification of No Child Left Behind, 2001 (Valli & Buese, 2007). In response to increased policy demands within the past two decades of this study, teachers have felt more discouraged, unsure of job expectations, and lacked confidence to fulfill administrative demands (Valli & Buese, 2007).

## **Current Research on Departmentalization**

As elementary schools first became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most elementary classrooms were in rural settings across the United States, surrounded by farming communities (Liu, 2011). Schools were first built as one-room classrooms where students were grouped according to age, much how it continued to be. Although the rise of industrialization in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century led to rural communities being created into larger cities and high schools forming in the cities, elementary school still reflected the same structure as their original rural setting counterparts (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) conducted a case study where he/she evaluated the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized and self-contained organizational structures according to student teachers. The study had 62 student teacher participants (Liu, 2011). Proponents of the departmentalized structure argued the following advantages of the departmentalized organizational structure in elementary schools: 1) teacher specialization, 2) classroom transitions, and 3) increased teacher retention rates (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Liu, 2011).

Reed (2002) further studied the advantages and disadvantages the departmentalized organizational structure. Reed (2002) conducted a study at Colin Powell Elementary School in Texas from 1997-2000. The departmentalized structure was initially chosen because the fourth-grade teachers felt the change in structure would show a positive increase in student academic achievement. The school used teacher choice to decide what subject each teacher would be responsible for. Reed (2002) reported the following advantages according to teacher participants: 1) academic planning, 2) teacher and student relationships, 3)

collaboration among teachers, 4) classroom transitions, 5) teacher and parent relationships, and 6) improvement in student interpersonal skills. The quantitative data collected was gathered from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The following improvements were reported: 10% increase in student mastery of all reading objectives from 1997-1998, 28% increase in student mastery of all math objectives from 1999-2000, and 15% increase in student mastery of all writing objectives from 1998-1999. Based on conversations with the students, the fourth-grade students were excited to experiment with having more than one teacher and the flexibility to be able to move between classes and teachers.

Andrews (2006) investigated the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization in three fifth-grade classrooms in Lincoln Public Schools in Nebraska. Andrews (2006) reported the following advantages under the departmentalized structure, 1) academic planning, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) classroom transitions.

Hood (2010) conducted a similar study where the advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized organizational structure in third through fifth grade were determined. Hood (2010) reported the following advantages under the departmentalized structure: 1) academic rigor, 2) classroom transitions, and 3) teacher and student relationships. Jeffrey Hernandez, then-principal of Lakeview Elementary School in Miami, credited the implementation of departmentalization to the overall improvement of the district's overall score of "D" to an "A", on the state rating system. When Hernandez became a regional administrator in Dade County, Hernandez led the implementation of

departmentalization in around 40 elementary school and the state saw a dramatic increase in student academic achievement. Hernandez (as cited by Hood, 2010), reported that professional development became easier because teachers were more focused on becoming specialists in a subject. Hood (2010), reported in the nine years, there has been overall academic achievement and growth on state testing since the implementation of departmentalization.

In the year 2010, Superintendent Ms. Amanda Alexander oversaw the progress of 12 schools experimenting with the departmentalized structure (Gewerts, 2014). Alexander noticed since 2008, there was a growth in teacher interest in the departmentalized organizational structure that led to the decision made to departmentalize (Gewerts, 2014). Gewerts (2014) argued to deepen teachers' content knowledge, a high level of quality professional development had to exist. Teachers argued when professional development was available in a specific content area, teachers were more likely to get better at teaching, more efficiently. After the one year of implementation, several schools went back to the traditional model of being self-contained (Gewerts, 2014). The following three years after the switch to departmentalization, the 12 schools showed exponential growth as compared to the other schools in the district that remains to be under the traditional self-contained structure. Gewerts (2014) argued if each structure is age-appropriate and kept the process student-centered, both departmentalized and self-contained structures can be successful.

Lee, Martin, and Trim (2016) were interested in researching the impact of departmentalization in elementary school. The researchers conducted the study within a Middle Tennessee school district (Lee et al. 2016). The researchers were

specifically interested in the effect of departmentalization on student achievement and engagement in elementary schools within third through fifth grades (Lee et al., 2016). For the study, researchers analyzed the decision made by each of the schools within the district. There were 23 schools that participated in the study (Lee et al., 2016). The researchers determined TCAP scores as well as teacher effect data from the school year as the data gathered to determine which organizational structure was most effective for third through fifth grade and which organizational structure had the most impact on overall student achievement (Lee et al., 2016). The researchers also performed administrator and teacher interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups in order to determine perceptions of the effect the departmentalized organizational structure has on student engagement within third through fifth grades (Lee et al., 2016). After the conclusion of the research, there was no significant difference found among the data collected to compare the level of student achievement (Lee et al., 2016). However, the researchers were able to report further advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained and departmentalized organizational structures specifically within third through fifth grades (Lee et al., 2016).

The following outcomes were determined by the study. There was no statistically significant difference in third through fifth grade reading and math achievement within a departmentalized structure compared to a self-contained structure. There was a statistically significant difference in third grade science achievement within a departmentalized structure compared to a self-contained structure. Furthermore, four different models of departmentalization were determined. There was no statistically significant difference in fourth and fifth



grade science achievement within a departmentalized structure compared to a self-contained structure. The majority of teacher participants felt students were engaged—very engaged under the departmentalized structure. The majority of teacher participants agreed that student behavior was more positive under the departmentalized structure. Of the participants, 75% of administrator and teacher participants agreed that the teacher was the primary factor in the level of student engagement, and not specifically either organizational structure (Lee et al., 2016). The following two advantages were determined from the study concerning departmentalization: academic planning and relationships between teachers and students (Lee et al., 2016). The following disadvantages were determined from the study concerning departmentalization: 1) lack of teacher and student relationships, 2) lack of flexibility with classroom transitions, and 3) lack of collaboratively planning with other teachers.

Woods (2017) was also interested in determining the most effective classroom organizational structure specifically in third grade. Woods (2017) used the students' TCAP data to measure student achievement to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each organizational structures in elementary school. The researcher was interested in determining how the departmentalized organizational structure altered student achievement in third grade (Woods, 2017). The researcher was interested in how the departmentalized determined teacher effect, and lastly the perceptions of third grade students concerning the departmentalized organizational structure (Woods, 2017). The participants in the study were all located in one school district. All schools except one included two years of student data results. The school that remained included only one year of

student data. The results were found with no increased percentage in overall Federal Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) (Woods, 2017). Researchers also measured college and career readiness of fourth and fifth grade students (Woods, 2017). Researchers were able to determine college and career readiness based on the scores from fourth and fifth grade students in reading and mathematics (Woods, 2017). Only one school showed an increase in scores over the course of the two years in both reading and mathematics (Woods, 2017). The schools that remained all either decreased in at least one of the subjects or did not improve both years (Woods, 2017).

Webel et al. (2017) conducted a case study researching the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized organizational structure over the course of one academic year. The study consisted of three participants who had each received their Elementary Mathematics Specialist (EMS) certification. The three participants were specifically chosen after all teachers were invited to participate but since the focus of the study was departmentalization, only three participants were chosen (Webel et al., 2017). The researchers were interested in determining the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization in upper elementary math classrooms (Webel et al., 2017). The researchers gathered data based on the results of interviews of the teachers. The researchers determined that the most beneficial finding from the study was determining that there were multiple versions of departmentalization. With each of the types came a different set of advantages and disadvantages. The three following models of departmentalization were determined from the study: 1) team approach (team of two teachers who equally split the subjects taught), 2) class

swap (classroom only switches for one subject), and 3) grade-level mathematics teacher (most like departmentalized structure in secondary education) (Webel et al., 2017). The following advantages of the departmentalized organizational structure were determined: 1) academic planning, 2) increased opportunities for collaboration among teachers, and 3) increased feelings of autonomy (Webel et al., 2017). There were more disadvantages that were determined by the researchers (Webel et al., 2017). The following disadvantages were determined from the study: 1) lack of equal learning opportunities, 2) reduced flexibility in duration of lessons, 3) lack of collaboration among teachers, 4) inadequate guidance, and 5) limited resources (Webel et al., 2007).

Gilmore (2016) conducted a study focused on three popular organizational structures in third grade. The three organizational structures examined were: 1) a departmentalized two-teacher team, 2) a departmentalized three-teacher team, and 3) a self-contained teacher model. Gilmore (2016) sought to determine academic achievement of the third grade students under all three organizational structures. Gilmore (2016) also examined the levels of self-efficacy in teachers under each of the organizational structures. Gilmore (2016) also examined students' perceptions on the three organizational structures in third grade. Gilmore (2016) determined third grade students scored highest in reading under the self-contained classroom. The two-teacher team had the highest student scores in both reading and math. Finally, the three-teacher team had the highest math scores of the three organizational structures examined (Gilmore, 2016). Gilmore (2016) determined teacher self-efficacy was determined the self-contained teachers had a high self-efficacy measurement as measured by responses given on the surveys. However,

results of teacher perceptions on teacher and student relationships were measured highest from both departmentalized organizational structures which did not align with the extant literature on departmentalization in elementary schools. Finally, the researcher determined students most enjoyed the departmentalized organizational structures. The two primary factors that led students to enjoy the departmentalized structure most were relationships with more than one adult and classroom transitions were enjoyable.

Parker et al. (2017) examined the perceptions of organizational structures in kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools according to elementary administrators and the factors in the decision-making process of adopting the departmentalized organizational structure or to remain self-contained. The study was conducted in a very large school district and researchers initially sent out surveys to all 76 elementary administrators (Parker et al., 2007). Of the 76 administrators, 54 of the participants returned the survey, and finally 29 of the participants agreed to a follow-up interview (Parker et al., 2007). The researchers did not determine any statistical difference between the organizational structures concerning grade levels or demographics of students (Parker et al., 2007). The researchers determined that personal beliefs and perceived outcomes were the primary outcomes of what led administrators in the decision-making process (Parker et al., 2007). Researchers also determined administrators that were proponents of the self-contained structure argued it to be most beneficial for kindergarten through fifth grade elementary students because the strength of teacher and student relationships allowed students the best opportunity for academic achievement (Parker et al., 2007). Parker et al. (2007) determined the

capability of the teaching team to be a determining factor on the effectiveness and success of the departmentalized organizational structure.

### **Advantages of Departmentalization**

Of the schools using the departmentalized structure, many did so to meet the demands of accountability measures by giving students this specialized form of instruction from teachers (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007; Fink, 2017). Elementary school organizations adopted the departmentalized structure to increase student academic achievement and created more high-quality lessons for students (Fink, 2017). Fink (2017) found that teachers who had high reading and social studies test scores had decreased math and science scores; while teachers who had increased math and science scores, had a deficit in reading and social studies scores (Fink, 2017). This echoed the idea of difficulty for teachers to teach every subject assigned to the teacher well. Fink (2017) explored the implementation of departmentalization in William M. Boyd Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia. Then-assistant principal, Marcus Jackson, noticed that while some of the teachers had high mathematics and science student test scores, had low reading and social studies test scores, and vice-versa. Jackson compared departmentalization to sports and added some teachers were better at teaching some subjects than others, just as in sports, some are better at blocking than passing. Jackson argued the departmentalization structure allowed administrators to cater to the needs of every teacher (Fink, 2017). James Davis, a fourth-grade teacher at William M. Boyd Elementary, argued that teachers can very quickly intervene in student academics and allow teachers to give the students the support they need (Fink, 2017). According to Fink (2017), critics of the departmentalized structure argued “too

many transitions are disruptive for young children” due to lost instructional time during transitions (p. 40). Fink (2017) also reported “while some schools [tried] to minimize transitions by limiting the number of teachers per grade level, other schools have abandoned platooning after experiencing a negative impact from multiple transitions” (p. 40). Fink (2017) reported students were often not mature enough to handle the responsibility of having more than one general education teacher during the school year.

Under the departmentalized structure, teachers specialized in one content area and spend time planning for a single subject, emphasizing higher quality education for students (Andrews, 2006; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Chang et al., 2008; Gewerts, 2014). According to Jacob (2011), by shifting a teacher’s assignment to one the individual felt most effective ultimately led to increased academic achievement. After the implementation of departmentalization, many teachers had higher job satisfaction and an increased teacher retention rate (Chang et al., 2008). Andrews (2006) reported teachers felt more job satisfaction because teachers did not feel as overwhelmed about job responsibilities and workload.

Strohl (2014) investigated elementary teachers’ experiences and perceptions of departmentalization at the elementary school level in a rural South Georgia elementary school. Administrators of the elementary school implemented the departmentalized structure in first through third grade. The study included 12 first through third grade teachers, who had all previously been under the self-contained structure. Under the school’s departmentalized structure, one teacher was responsible for teaching math, science, and social studies while the other teacher was responsible for teaching language arts, reading, and writing. The

teachers taught a homeroom class the first half of the day, and then the students rotated, and the teacher taught the second block of students. Strohl (2014) gathered data from focus group interviews, teacher opinion questionnaires, departmentalized teacher interviews, teacher journals, teacher questionnaires. Strohl (2014) examined the advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized structure at the elementary classroom level, teacher efficacy, and teachers' perceptions on the shift from a self-contained structure to a departmentalized structure. Kindergarten was not included in the trial year of experimentation with departmentalization because administrators of the school felt the students were too young to benefit from the structure. Strohl (2014) reported teachers preferred the departmentalized structure over the self-contained structure because teachers had a lighter workload, higher-quality instruction, and increased self-efficacy. According to Strohl (2014), the two primary themes that were developed from the study were academic planning and teacher relationships with students and parents.

Liu (2011) examined the perceptions of pre-service teachers concerning departmentalization at the elementary level. Liu (2011) found that among many other advantages the pre-service teachers felt existed, the following were the most apparent in experiences within the elementary schools: classroom transitions and relationships between the teachers and students. Children who experienced a supportive environment during the early elementary years were more likely to have a successful middle and high school experience, pursue a postsecondary education, and an easier transition into adulthood (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Chan et al., 2009; Walker, 2009; Gewerts, 2014; Annie E. Casey, 2018).

Many pre-service teachers felt teachers and children under the departmentalized structure genuinely enjoyed the setting (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) discovered many of the pre-service teachers felt it was important for teachers to be knowledgeable and skillful in all subjects, but it was also important to understand that elementary teachers will not enjoy teaching all the subjects due to personal preference. One pre-service teacher commented that under the departmentalized structure, it allowed all students to experience a teacher in each subject who most knowledgeable and skillful in that subject (Liu, 2011). Many of the pre-service teachers felt teachers were being specialized in a specific subject simply because teachers were in a subject in which they felt comfortable, as well as one they hopefully enjoyed teaching. One pre-service teacher agreed and compared teaching under a departmentalized structure to doctors who specialize in a specific field (Liu, 2011). The pre-service teacher went on to add, when a doctor was specialized in a certain field, one expected to get a specialist, and the same applied for teachers who were specialized in a subject. However, many researchers cautioned against the expectation that just because a teacher is assigned the subject most ideal, did not make the teacher a specialist.

Liu (2011) discovered that students under the departmentalized structure felt less pressured and stressed after experiencing departmentalization at such a young age. Pre-service teachers felt by the time students got ready to enter junior-high school, students were much better prepared for the transitions that can sometimes be difficult for students who have usually experienced self-contained structure for most of childhood (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) reported one pre-service teacher as stating teachers saved financially if teachers were only assigned one or



two subjects. Whereas under the self-contained model, teachers that had to purchase teaching resources for every subject became a financial burden, especially for new elementary teachers (Liu, 2011).

### **Disadvantages of Departmentalization**

Opponents of the departmentalized structure argued that experimentation with departmentalization in grades as young as kindergarten, risked a loss in teacher-student bond and feeling of security that was important in student development at this young age (Gewerts, 2014). Fink (2017) found under the departmentalized structure in elementary schools, teachers placed more focus on the content, as compared to the child. Liu (2011) reported pre-service teachers experienced a loss in quality of teacher-student relationships under the departmentalized structure. Many of the pre-service teachers felt they did not know the students as well, since there were so many students to teach during the day (Liu, 2011). The pre-service teachers felt that a strong relationship between the teacher and student would lead to higher student academic achievement, however the author did not include research to agree with the pre-service teachers' claims (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) reported pre-service teachers under the departmentalized structure, felt an increase loss of integration among subjects. Although it was ideal for teachers to plan together so students began to see connections among the subjects, sometimes time did not allow for that to be feasible (Liu, 2011). Another concern by many pre-service teachers was the importance of elementary students learning by making connections (Liu, 2011). When subjects were separated, integration was very difficult to achieve for students who attempted to make connections on their own (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011)

reported younger students may struggle with the class changing. Many of the pre-service teachers remembered switching classes as young as third grade and voiced that even that late in elementary school was still very difficult changing teachers and environments because of personality differences, and many young children are shy (Liu, 2011).

### **Administrative Decision to Departmentalize**

According to Minott (2016), in most cases the administrator did not have the final say in whether a school departmentalizes, but rather it was the job of the district superintendent. However, administrators had the ability to gather insight from the school's teachers by engaging in conversations about what was best for the individual school (Minott, 2016). According to Chan et al. (2009) the decision to departmentalize began with interest from school personnel, and/or parents. Kowalski and Langley (2009) argued the importance of gathering evidence from multiple sources and ultimately the decision had to be research-based. Collectively, these methods allowed for administrators to have evidence at the local level and use available empirical evidence on the departmentalized structure (Kowalski & Langley, 2009).

**School Structure.** According to Weiss (1995), the school structure ultimately impacted administrators' decision to adopt the departmentalized organizational structure. Each school system uniquely had a system of moving students through (Baker, 2011). This affected the teachers' perceptions of an organizational structure (Baker, 2011). The organizational structure of a school was the framework for achieving student success (Otto & Sanders, 1964). Baker (2011) argued, a school needed two systems: 1) *horizontal*—in which to move

students through grade levels until graduation, and 2) *vertical*—students being dispersed equally among the available educators. A school’s vertical system provided a way to move students through graded patterns (Goodlad, 1966). Baker (2011) argued the most dependent variables in a school’s organizational structure was the following: 1) learners, 2) curricula, and 3) teachers. The ultimate decision in how many educators were responsible for a group of students was based on the educator and the educator’s certification (Goodlad, 1966). Goodlad (1966) argued, subjects may very well be departmentalized, and the classrooms self-contained. Many teachers lacked the ability to intertwine subject areas to achieve best results in a self-contained classroom, therefore it may have been best to assume a departmentalized organizational structure, since subjects were laid out in that manner anyways (Goodlad, 1966).

**Teacher Buy-in/Resources.** Administrators needed to allow plenty of time for grade-level teachers to collaborate for the departmentalized structure to be successful (Merenbloom, 2006). During the school year, it was important for teachers to meet with one another and administrators, in the departmentalized structure process (Merenbloom, 2006). According to Chan et al. (2009), under the departmentalized structure, the school system risked the close student-teacher bond as well as developmentally appropriate instruction. Chan et al., (2009) reported parents were concerned about multiple teachers being involved in their child’s education, and their child not being as well-known by the teachers. According to Chan et al., (2009), teacher buy-in was crucial to the success of the implementation of departmentalization. Before implementing the departmentalized structure, an inventory of teacher resources needed to be

conducted by administrators and educators (Chan et al., 2009). Items needed to be included in the inventory ranged from teachers' qualifications and certifications for accuracy to revisions of instructional strategies currently being used (Chan et al., 2009). Administrators should have also evaluated required instructional times blocks assigned from the state to ensure state mandates are met. Furthermore, allotted teacher work hours must be evaluated to ensure educators have fulfilled contractual agreements.

**Parent/Stakeholder Involvement.** Chan et al. (2009) suggested parent involvement initially to help parents understand the importance of the initiative, and how it benefitted the students academically. Chan et al. (2009) argued when parents understand the value of departmentalization or any initiative, the parents will be more supportive. According to Chan et al. (2009), parents were a potential resource in the implementation phase of departmentalizing, and it was essential for parents to be involved in the foundational decision-making steps of the process. All school personnel and district employees (superintendents, curriculum directors, and school board members) needed to be involved in all stages of the implementation process (Chan et al., 2009). Chan et al. (2009) explained continuous support for all stakeholders proved to be a critical resource in the implementation process. Chan et al. (2009) recommended since the decision to departmentalize ultimately is decided by the superintendent and school board, it was recommended school administrators work with the district curriculum supervisor.

## **Current Research on the Self-Contained Classroom**

The expectation for the self-contained classroom in elementary school was that students had both academic and emotional needs met (Bezeau, 2007; Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011; Canady & Rettig, 2008; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lobdell & van Ness, 1963; Russ et al., 2007). Advocates for the self-contained structure argued the structure: 1) allowed for students to receive individualized instruction from an all-subjects specialist, 2) allowed teachers to reinforce student learning, 3) promoted students to have more independent and develop self-direction, and 4) supported the child's psychological development (Allen et al., 2013; Berry & O'Connor, 2010; Bierman et al., 2010; Reyes, Brackett et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2010; Zins, Elias, Greenberg, & Weissberg, 2000).

Alspaugh and Harting (1995) reported a decline in math and reading achievement for four out of five experimental groups who made the transition from self-contained to the departmentalized structure in the first year of implementation. To properly evaluate the effectiveness of the departmentalized structure, schools followed the lead of former principal Daniel Terry, who based success upon faculty reports and scores from the state testing (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). Most importantly, before making the shift to teacher specialization, it was imperative for a school system to allow at least one school year for the process to work before giving up on the model (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995).

McGrath and Rust (2002) conducted a study that compared the departmentalized and self-contained organizational structures and reported

significant gains on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) among a group of fifth- and sixth-graders under the self-contained structure in language and science. However, there were no significant differences in math, reading, or social studies. McGrath and Rust (2002) reported students took significantly longer to transition between classes and noted no significant differences were reported concerning instructional time. Although the results of this study were limited, researchers confirmed predictions of the following: students in self-contained classroom structures showed greater academic achievement, took less time during subject transitions, teachers had more uninterrupted instructional time, and teachers had greater flexibility in scheduling (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Individuals who preferred the self-contained model in elementary schools argued the self-contained structure allows teachers to focus more on the child as opposed to the subject.

### **Advantages of the Self-Contained Classroom**

Many researchers (Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967; Thornell, 1980; Walters, 1970) agreed on the following advantages of the self-contained organizational structure: 1) individualization, 2) flexibility in use of time, 3) correlation of knowledge and skills across subjects, 4) development of students' independence, and 5) opportunities to guide and support students' emotional and psychological development. Although many elementary schools were still under a self-contained structure, it did not look like the traditional model of what teaching used to look like (Minott, 2016). Many proponents of the self-contained classroom had the presumption that students received a high-quality interdisciplinary education from a teacher who had a general specialization in all the subjects taught, however this

was very rarely the case (Anderson, 1962; Bezeau, 2007; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Gerretson, Bosnick, & Schofield, 2008; Reid, 2012). Instructional flexibility was often cited as an advantage of the self-contained structure because teachers guided their own instruction and timing to how long or how quickly content was introduced or reviewed (Friend & Cook, 2007; Tomlinson & Allan, 2000).

Chan et al. (2009) argued under this model the teacher and students created a home-like environment to make the transition from home to school a much more seamless for students and parents. Under this model the student viewed the teacher as a parental figure and younger students benefitted from having the same teacher every day because the self-contained structure provided stability and continuity for the whole year (Chan et al., 2009; Hood 2010). Chan, et al. (2009), found student academic achievement was significantly higher in some subjects under the self-contained structure. Students who had a strong relationship with teachers was cited by many as being a strong advantage of the self-contained structure (Bezeua, 2007; Chang et al., 2008; Schonert-Reichl, & Zakrzewski, 2014). Cannady and Rettig (2008) cited under the self-contained structure, teachers had the knowledge and pedagogy to teach elementary students and understand how young students learn best, however the researchers agree that not every self-contained classroom was going to be high-quality and not every elementary student was going to receive the individualized instruction the student needs to academically achieve. Although supporters of the self-contained classroom argued the structure allowed for the best emotional setting for students, there was no evidence stating the departmentalized structure was harmful to the development of children so young. Proponents of the departmentalized structure

have often found it was developmentally appropriate for students to be exposed to multiple viewpoints and teaching methods from the experience of students having more than one teacher (Ackerlund, 1959).

### **Disadvantages of the Self-contained Classroom**

Under the self-contained structure, many teachers felt as though they did not know their students well enough to plan individualized educational interventions and enrichments for every subject they are responsible for teaching (Andrews, 2006). It was unlikely teachers who were responsible for teaching every subject, had the time to adequately plan for highly rigorous lessons in every subject as compared to teachers only responsible for one or two subjects.

Andrews (2006) reported, teachers seldom had time to plan meaningful and engaging lessons for the students and include other additional resources. Chan and Jarman (2004) argued that while elementary teachers were required to be specialists in all subjects, many teachers lacked the expertise to successfully teach every subject. Varma and Hanusein (2008) reported while elementary teachers complete college courses, “40% have taken four or fewer semesters of science coursework” as compared to secondary teachers who were required to successfully complete coursework in a subject area before completion of graduation (p. 594). Reyes and Fennell argued it was unrealistic for “elementary teachers to have the specialized knowledge to facilitate mathematics instruction, as well as knowledge for every other subject they teach” (as cited in Gerretson et al., 2008, p. 303).



## **Summary**

Advantages and disadvantages existed under both the self-contained and departmentalized model. However, administrators choose the organizational structure that best benefitted and supported the current students' academic performance. Both self-contained and departmentalized classroom structures were successful, if it was developmentally appropriate for the students (Gewerts, 2014). Ultimately, the debate concerning the most ideal organizational structure in elementary schools was rooted in the belief that teachers should be content specialists no matter what subjects are assigned (Minott, 2016).

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

This chapter described the research design used to guide the research analyzing administrators' and teachers' perspectives of the departmentalized organizational structure and self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade of elementary schools in a rural school district in East Tennessee. This chapter also included a description of the population and sample, research instrumentation, data collection methods, limitations, and delimitations.

#### **Research Design**

The purpose of the study was to determine the perspectives of teachers and administrators of the departmentalized organizational structure and the self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade classrooms in a rural East Tennessee school district. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research was defined as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4).

This researcher used a qualitative case study method for this study. One attribute of a qualitative method was being able to provide an in-depth understanding to the researcher of the participants' experiences, and thus individual perspectives (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). This researcher chose to use a qualitative case study method for the research because the qualitative method allowed this researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding the departmentalized and self-contained organizational structures in rural public elementary schools (Merriam, 2009).

According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), a qualitative case study was defined as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (p. 232–233). The case study design was chosen because this researcher was able to collect data efficiently and effectively to examine the overall perceptions of teachers and administrators on departmentalization and self-contained organizational structures. The case study method also allowed for the least influence of personal biases to be present because this researcher was able to record results directly from the questionnaires and then report the results for further use in the study. This researcher used semi-structured open-ended questionnaires to gather teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of the departmentalized and self-contained classroom structure at the elementary school level. This researcher chose to conduct questionnaires to allow the participants to be honest and candid with individual responses without hesitation of sharing honest and open thoughts with this researcher. This researcher concluded the method allowed for a more in-depth and detailed research study to provide reliable and valid research to the existing field concerning organizational structures at the elementary level.

### **Population of the Study**

A qualitative case study was conducted in a pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade rural public-school district. The school district contained 13 schools, seven of which are elementary schools. According to the Tennessee State Report Card (2018), there were 31 administrators, 288 teachers, and 4,105 students in the county. In the school district, the student population was 96% Caucasian, and the remaining four percent were African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Native

American/Alaskan. The English Learner percentage was 0.3%, and 39.9% of the district was economically disadvantaged. In the district, (13.8%) students have learning disabilities. The district student-teacher ratio was 13:1. According to Tennessee State Report Card (2018) state test scores, eight percent of students were proficient in mathematics, and 34% proficient in reading. Due to the significant number of low socioeconomic families, free lunch was provided to every student in the county.

The district superintendent and administrators had made the choice to departmentalize four of the seven elementary schools in kindergarten through second grade. The remaining three elementary schools continued under the traditional self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. The following schools operated under the departmentalization organizational structure: Cook Primary, Midview Elementary, Rutledge Primary, and Taylorsville Elementary School (pseudonyms). Cook Primary, Midview Elementary, and Rutledge Primary have been departmentalized for three academic school years. Taylorsville Elementary departmentalized during the 2018-2019 academic school year in first grade, as second through fourth grades had already adopted the departmentalized structure. The following schools remained under the traditional self-contained organizational structure for elementary schools: Elms Primary, Prairie Ridge School, and Springfield Elementary (pseudonyms).

The participants of this study included 40 kindergarten through second grade teachers and 10 administrators in one rural East Tennessee public school district. The participants were contacted in person during a scheduled faculty meeting at each of the participating elementary schools. The total number of

survey respondents were, 25 kindergarten through second grade teachers and eight administrators represented a 63% return rate for teachers and an 80% return rate for administrators. Forty-four percent of respondents were kindergarten teachers, 32% were first grade, 20% were second grade, and four percent of the participants taught more than one included grade level of this study. After this researcher collected all of the questionnaires and this researcher began the open coding process, this researcher assigned each participant a corresponding letter to better organize participants' responses.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A limitation of the study was the small sample size collected. This researcher only identified one rural East Tennessee school district; therefore, the results and findings of this study were not generalized to other school districts. Another limitation of the study was several of the departmentalized elementary schools were semi-departmentalized, and not true departmentalization by definition. A delimitation that existed within this study was this researcher only chose to use one school district located in rural East Tennessee. Another delimitation of the study was this researcher chose to only report and conduct research in kindergarten through second grade within the East Tennessee rural school district. This researcher also chose to only collect the perceptions of teachers and administrators, and not support staff. This researcher chose to only report the findings in kindergarten through second grade because the field of research concerning the grade levels is lacking empirical evidence surrounding the perceptions of administrators and teachers at elementary schools.

Furthermore, this researcher chose to collect data from questionnaires and not interviews.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection method used in this qualitative study was semi-structured questionnaires. Semi-structured open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from elementary school administrators and teachers about their perceptions of departmentalized and self-contained organizational structures in rural elementary schools based on personal experiences. This researcher used the following four questionnaire types: 1) self-contained kindergarten through second grade administrator, 2) self-contained kindergarten through second grade teachers, 3) departmentalized kindergarten through second grade administrators, and 4) departmentalized kindergarten through second grade teachers. This researcher used teacher and administrator questionnaires from three researchers who conducted a similar study in a Middle Tennessee school district (Lee et al., 2016). Approval to use the questionnaires was granted by all three researchers to use the questionnaires in the case study by email correspondence. The purpose of the questionnaires was to gather participants' perceptions on organizational structures at the kindergarten through second grade level and because the extant research on organizational structures at the kindergarten through second grade level was lacking empirical evidence.

This researcher obtained written consent from members of the school district board committee and district director where this researcher attended and presented the research proposal to the committee at a monthly meeting. All members of the committee approved of the research study to be conducted. This

researcher requested permission from the IRB to conduct questionnaires at each of the elementary school site placements. Permission was granted from each administrator at the schools prior to attendance for administrator and teacher participation by written consent of email. All kindergarten through second grade school teachers within each school site present at the faculty meeting were encouraged to participate in the questionnaires. Each participant of the study completed an informed consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. Each participant understood individual participation was completely voluntary. Participants who were not present at the faculty meetings were emailed the information, informed consent form, and the appropriate questionnaire. Participants were not at any risk during the process of data collection for the research. This researcher administered the questionnaires on paper by attending a faculty meeting at each school for teachers and administrators to complete the questionnaires. The participants completed the questionnaires during the faculty meetings. This researcher passed out a questionnaire to each kindergarten through second grade teacher and administrator. The administrators and teachers who did not want to participate were asked to remain seated while the research participants completed the questionnaires. This researcher asked each participant what organizational structure the teacher or administrator taught under and then gave the participant the corresponding questionnaire. For the administrators who were considered under both organizational structures, the administrator chose which questionnaire the individual preferred to complete. This researcher included a combination of open and closed-ended questions on each of the questionnaires. All participants completed the questionnaires during the faculty meetings which

allowed this researcher to complete the data collection process quickly after all faculty meetings were attended. This researcher collected the questionnaires following the faculty meetings.

### **Analytical Methods**

After this researcher had completed the data collection period, this researcher organized the questionnaires and sorted the questionnaires by teacher and administrator responses. This researcher recorded notes and highlighted similarities in the questionnaire responses, which was this researcher's primary method for open coding the results. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), open coding was defined as a "shorthand designation in various aspects of [the] data so that [this researcher] can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 199). This researcher recorded questionnaire findings in a separate document. This researcher kept all information in a private personal safe, and all individuals who participated in the research understood that any information gathered was either destroyed after the conclusion of the study, or names of schools and individuals had a pseudonym given to ensure privacy of the schools and individuals involved in the research process. All manual data collected by this researcher was copied over to a password-protected personal computer to serve as a backup file for this researcher saved on a jump drive and kept in the personal safe.

After this researcher open coded the data collected, this researcher created categories based on the results from the questionnaires from the teachers and administrators. This researcher set a goal to begin with 25-30 categories. Creswell (2014) suggested organizing data in this way, then this researcher further narrowed the study down to "five or six [reoccurring] themes" (p. 184).



According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), a category (for the use of qualitative research design) was defined as “a theme, a pattern, a finding, or an answer to a research question” (p. 204). From the categories, there were some sub-categories that this researcher created as this researcher narrowed the focus of the study. As this researcher open coded for reoccurring categories and themes, this researcher reflected on the personal biases brought into the data by the research. This researcher took the data gathered from teacher and administrator questionnaires to further support the extant literature concerning organizational structures at the elementary school level.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The teacher and administrator questionnaires were previously used in a study in a Middle Tennessee school district (Lee et al., 2016). This researcher received permission to use the questionnaires. Lee et al. (2016) gathered data to further the field of research concerning organizational structures at the upper elementary and middle school grade levels. The three researchers developed the questionnaires based on the detailed findings in the review of the literature (Lee et al., 2016). The primary purpose of the questionnaires was to gain insight on perceptions made by teachers and administrators concerning departmentalization and self-contained organizational structures (Lee et al., 2016). The researchers stated the questionnaires were an open-ended format and explained teacher and administrator perceptions on self-contained and departmentalized classrooms, reflections on benefits and disadvantages of both organizational structures, instructional models, and perceived levels of student engagement by administrators and teachers under both organizational structures (Lee et al., 2016).

The administrator questionnaires consisted of three parts: 1) school information about chosen organizational structures, 2) Likert-scale format asking perceptions of the organizational structures, and 3) some school sites chose to utilize both organizational structures within the building therefore administrators were able to offer perceptions on both organizational structures (Lee et al., 2016). This researcher chose the questionnaires for reliability and validity primarily because the questionnaires were already successfully a part of a research study within the state of Tennessee.

This researcher identified and documented any personal biases that existed during the research process in a separate document. This researcher was able to limit personal bias by open coding the questionnaires and reported findings that were similar among the themes this researcher was able to discover during the data collection process. This researcher reported the research findings and data collection back to the county for further review into the decision-making process of organizational structures specifically in kindergarten through second grade.

### **Assumptions and Biases of the Study**

The assumptions made while the case study was conducted were teachers and administrators were able to share perceptions under the departmentalized organization structure as compared to the self-contained organizational structure without being pressured by any outside factors. A personal bias existed because this researcher was an elementary teacher in a rural setting who has taught under the departmentalized and the self-contained organizational structures for six years. Any personal opinions or direct statements that came from this researcher were omitted from the research. This researcher did not participate in the teacher

questionnaires. The team members of this researcher also did not participate in the research study and teacher questionnaires.

## **Chapter IV: Analyses and Results**

Many elementary schools have experimented with the self-contained and departmentalized organizational structures; however, evidence lacked support for either and the results were inconclusive (ASCD, 2011; Glennon et al., 2013; Liu, 2011; Minott, 2016; Ornstein, 2011; Strohl et al., 2014). Furthermore, there was a lack of evidence concerning organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade. Liu (2011) emphasized the importance of expanding the research field on departmentalization and the self-contained classroom to provide future elementary teachers, administrators, and researchers with the understanding of challenges faced in elementary school surrounding organizational structure. By comparing the teachers' and administrators' perceptions on the departmentalized and self-contained structures, one can further understand the importance of organizational structure to the improvement of student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Baker, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to expand the existing body of literature comparing teachers' and administrators' perceptions on the departmentalized and the self-contained organizational structure specifically in kindergarten through second grade classrooms in a rural East Tennessee school district. This researcher created the research questions based on the lack of empirical evidence found concerning organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade. Within this study, this researcher reported advantages and disadvantages of both organizational structures determined by kindergarten through second grade teachers and administrators within one rural East Tennessee public school district.

This researcher collected data using four different questionnaires. This researcher used four corresponding questionnaires for the following participant categories: 1) self-contained kindergarten through second grade teacher, 2) self-contained kindergarten through second grade administrator, 3) departmentalized kindergarten through second grade teacher, and 4) departmentalized kindergarten through second grade administrator. This researcher passed out a questionnaire to each kindergarten through second grade teacher and administrator. The administrators and teachers who did not want to participate were asked to remain seated while the research participants completed the questionnaires. This researcher asked each participant what organizational structure the teacher or administrator taught under and then gave the participant the corresponding questionnaire. For the administrators who were considered under both organizational structures, the administrator chose which questionnaire the individual preferred to complete. This researcher included a combination of open and closed-ended questions on each of the questionnaires. All participants completed the questionnaires during the faculty meetings which allowed this researcher to complete the data collection process quickly after all faculty meetings were attended.

### **Data Analysis**

The participants of this study included 40 kindergarten through second grade teachers and 10 administrators in one rural East Tennessee public school district. The participants were contacted in person during a scheduled faculty meeting at each of the participating elementary schools. The total number of survey respondents were, 25 kindergarten through second grade teachers and

eight administrators represented a 63% return rate for teachers and an 80% return rate for administrators. Forty-four percent of respondents were kindergarten teachers, 32% were first grade, 20% were second grade, and four percent were classified as other. This researcher determined 45 codes from the transcripts during the open coding process. After the 45 codes were determined, this researcher developed categories from the 45 codes. This researcher developed the following categories from the data analysis process: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, 3) academic planning.

### **Research Questions**

**Research question 1.** What were the reported perceptions of the administrators within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

Three self-contained administrators participated in this study. Each administrator worked in a school that was self-contained in kindergarten through second grade prior to when the administrators began at the school. This was the ultimate decision-making factor that led the administrators to continue to utilize the self-contained organizational structure within kindergarten through second grade. Out of the three school sites, one administrator chose to keep kindergarten self-contained, while first and second grade adopted the departmentalized organizational structure. The administrator did not provide a reason of why this choice was made. One participant conducted research on organizational structures within kindergarten through second grade, and determined the self-contained organizational structure was the most effective for the students.

This researcher assigned each participant a corresponding letter to represent each participant and responses. This researcher open coded the self-contained administrators' questionnaires and determined 14 codes from the questionnaires. This researcher then developed the following three categories based on the codes: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning. The first category determined by this researcher was classroom transition. Classroom transition represented the time spent switching to a different task, subject, or teacher with a group of students.

The second category determined by this researcher was teacher and student relationships. Teacher and student relationships referred to the participants' experiences of the relationships with each student in the classroom. All participants continuously discussed the importance of strong relationships between the teacher and students. The participants also discussed the disadvantages of having the same students all day. Academic planning was the final category determined by this researcher, and referred to the process of teachers planning individually or collaboratively with other teachers to prepare for classroom lessons. Administrators determined the disadvantages associated with self-contained teachers having to plan for all subjects and the difficulty associated with doing so. Each category was present in the self-contained administrators' responses, and this researcher determined advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained organizational structure specifically in kindergarten through second grade based on the administrators' perceptions.

This researcher determined classroom transition as an advantage of the self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. All

participants agreed that classroom transition was smoother and easier to accomplish under the self-contained organizational structure with kindergarten through second grade students. The reason given for a smoother classroom transition was because self-contained teachers were “more in control of their classroom schedule” according to Administrator G. The other administrators agreed and emphasized that the classroom teacher needed classroom procedures and routines established to ensure smooth classroom transition. The remaining participants cited the self-contained organizational structure allowed the teacher to plan and alter the schedule more freely if needed. Administrator A stated, “[kindergarten through second grade] students [were] too young to be switching classes and having multiple teachers.” All participants agreed that students as young as kindergarten took much longer during classroom transition and instructional time was often lost during this time. The participants did not present any disadvantages with classroom transition concerning the self-contained organizational structure.

The second reoccurring category determined was teacher and student relationships. Administrator participants presented differing perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of teacher and student relationships within the self-contained organizational structure. Administrator participants stated the importance of strong teacher and student relationships throughout given responses. Administrator H argued, “structure and stability [were] important at this age.” Administrators also agreed the importance of students as young as kindergarten through second grade needed as few as possible adults to get used to and felt young students would struggle with having multiple teachers.



Administrator H added, “[kindergarten through second grade] students [felt] bonded to the teacher, and therefore “the parents also [felt] bonded to the teacher.” Administrators perceived there was an academic benefit to teachers having the same group of students all day long. Administrator A stated, “the teachers can become more informed of [student] learning styles and difficulties when they have the same students all day.” A few disadvantages of the self-contained organizational structure were presented in the participant responses; however, some advantages were mentioned as important considerations. The two disadvantages that were documented concerning teacher and student relationships was student behavior and negative teacher and student relationships.

Administrator G stated, “it is [difficult] on teachers if behavior problems exist.” Each administrator participant cited that teacher and student relationships that were not positive did not allow for a break for the teacher nor the student, and negatively impacted the teacher and student relationship.

Academic planning was determined by this researcher to be very important to all administrator participants based on the questionnaire responses. With regards to academic planning, all administrator participants required self-contained teachers to participate in collaborative planning. Each administrator emphasized the importance of collaborative planning with one another in order to be most beneficial to the students. Although advantages existed concerning collaborative planning under the self-contained organizational structure, administrators stated finding time to plan with each other was difficult on the teachers. Therefore, at each school site, administrators scheduled times with common planning times that allowed for collaboration among the teachers. One

advantage of academic planning was the ability to plan in an interdisciplinary format. Administrator H argued, “integrating other content is easier” under the self-contained organizational structure. Along with the advantages of academic planning, many disadvantages existed because of the time that was required of teachers to plan. Of the participants, two administrators stated the amount of time spent planning was unknown; however all participants agreed the amount of time spent that kindergarten through second grade teachers spent planning under the self-contained organizational structure greatly surpassed the amount of time teachers spent under the departmentalized organizational structure. Administrator H stated, “many teachers [remained] after school to plan or call parents. Some teachers also [gave] up many summer days to prepare their classrooms and curriculum.” All participants agreed that it was very difficult on the self-contained teachers to plan effectively for all the subjects the teachers are required to teach. Administrator G argued, the self-contained organizational structure does not “allow for differentiation.”

The following reoccurring categories of: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning were all important aspects of the self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. Based on the responses from the administrators, this researcher determined the most prominent advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained organizational structure according to self-contained administrators in a kindergarten through second grade administrative role within a rural public school.

**Research question 2.** What were the reported perceptions of the teachers within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

The study had 15 self-contained kindergarten through second grade teacher participants. This researcher sorted questionnaires by grade level. This researcher gave kindergarten through second grade teachers a letter that corresponded to represent each participant. This researcher open coded the data collected for primary categories found within the data. This researcher then open coded the data collected into 15 reoccurring open codes. After the codes were determined by this researcher, this researcher then developed the following primary categories: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning.

This researcher assigned each participant a corresponding letter to represent each participant and responses. This researcher open coded the self-contained teachers' questionnaires and determined 15 codes from the questionnaires. The first category determined by this researcher was classroom transition. Classroom transition represented the time spent switching to a different task, subject, or teacher with a group of students. Classroom transition was determined to be an important factor under the self-contained organizational structure. The second category determined by this researcher was teacher and student relationships. Teacher and student relationships referred to the participants' experiences of the relationships with each student in the classroom. All participants discussed the importance of strong relationships between the

teacher and students. The participants also discussed the disadvantages of the teachers having the same students all day and how that could negatively impact the teacher and student relationship. Academic planning was the final category determined and referred to the process of teachers planning individually or collaboratively with other teachers to prepare for classroom lessons. Teachers determined the disadvantages associated with having to plan for all subjects and the difficulty associated with doing so. Each category was presented in the self-contained teachers' responses and this researcher determined both categories as advantages of the self-contained organizational structure specifically in kindergarten through second grade.

The first category determined by this researcher was classroom transition. All self-contained teacher participants spoke highly of the classroom transitions that occur. The advantages determined by the self-contained teachers included the following: 1) less time spent on classroom transitions, 2) daily schedule can be altered, and one participant voiced the ease of classroom transition for kindergarten students. Participant A stated “[classroom] transition is always a battle in kindergarten in the beginning.” Therefore, the self-contained classroom was found by this researcher to be more efficient for instructional time. One participant preferred the advantages of the self-contained organizational structure, however emphasized the importance of the teacher to determine classroom routines and procedures to help classroom transitions go as smoothly as possible. Teacher participants B and J emphasized the advantages of the teacher being in control of the daily schedule and how much time is spent on each subject or skill. Teacher J stated, “we can move from one subject to another without wasted time

and spending more time on areas needed.” Other participants agreed with responses that surrounded the importance of being focused more on individual students’ needs. One participant agreed advantages existed concerning classroom transition under the self-contained structure; however, the participant had taught under a departmentalized structure before and stated that it was nice to have a brain break in the middle of the day, which the self-contained organizational structure simply did not have unless you plan for it.

The second reoccurring category determined by this researcher was teacher and student relationships. The category of teacher and student relationships was presented with both advantages and disadvantages in the self-contained classroom. Teacher participants stated the importance of creating a strong bond and connection with students from the very beginning of the school year. Teacher N stated, “I spend the first few weeks of school fully devoted to establishing a relationship with each student, and I build on that all year long.” Of the participants, nine teachers argued students needed to be with one teacher all day long in order to feel safe and less stressed at school, especially in kindergarten through second grade. According to Teacher J, “students are much more engaged when they enjoy school and have a positive loving relationship with their teacher or adults.” All of kindergarten through second grade teacher participants felt they knew their students “very well.” Of the teacher responses, 15 shared the perceptions of why they felt like they knew their students very well under the self-contained organizational structure. Teacher A stated, “I spend countless hours working one on one, gathering data and getting to know each student as well as their families.” Teacher participants also voiced the importance

of taking time to learn each child's academic strengths and weakness, in order to be most beneficial to each student. All participants voiced getting to know their students under the self-contained organizational structure was much easier as compared to trying to do so under the departmentalized organizational structure. Teacher F stated, the "self-contained classrooms can reach students' needs more effectively. Teachers have more time to spend with students." Teacher I said the students "seemed to enjoy answering to only one person." Of the participant responses, six specifically discussed the advantage of better classroom management in self-contained classrooms. Participants cited such advantages as the following: 1) more discipline, 2) more follow-through on discipline, 3) better classroom control, 4) improved student behaviors resulting in less consequences, and 5) one set of rules and procedures to follow.

Along with the advantages described by teachers, there was one overwhelming disadvantage shared by all participants concerning teacher and student relationships. Of the participants, six teachers shared the disadvantage of negative student behavior in the classroom when a teacher has the student all day long. One teacher argued that students might function better going to multiple teachers, and the self-contained organizational structure did not allow for such exploration and opportunity to have one than one teacher and learning experience. Once again, six teachers stated the difficulty of dealing with a difficult student all day long. Teacher H explained, "sometimes if you have a very difficult class/student it's hard to never get a break from them." Further, Teacher K voiced a disadvantage and concern that the students "[got] too attached" to the teacher and had a hard time adjusting in the future grades.

The final category determined by self-contained teacher responses was academic planning. Of the participants, 10 of the self-contained teachers spoke positively about academic planning and the importance of it. The self-contained teachers discussed multiple advantages and disadvantages in kindergarten through second grade concerning academic planning. The following advantages were determined by self-contained teachers: 1) interdisciplinary planning, 2) collaborative planning, 3) professional learning communities, and 4) plan better with student data and knowledge of students. The following disadvantages were determined by the self-contained teacher participants: 1) more time spent planning, 2) teacher must know all the grade-level standards, 3) different teaching styles often clash, and 4) lack of time to adequately plan.

All teacher participants overwhelmingly responded positively about collaborative planning with grade level teams or within the county. Participants discussed the advantages of regularly attended professional learning communities (PLCs), and several of the participants had positive relationships with co-workers, and voiced the teachers share ideas and lessons regularly to help the lesson planning process be more seamless. Teacher A stated, "I never miss a PLC. I love the community our [kindergarten] teachers in the district has built and enjoy every opportunity I have to meet, collaborate, and plan with them." Teacher L stated, "PLCs help to discuss with others who teach the same grade or program gain ideas and share strategies or help answer questions." Of the participants, three teachers discussed how each team worked closely with one another to develop improvements for academic planning. Teacher A stated, "planning together has been so beneficial and helped] us be stronger teachers." Participants discussed the

importance of learning new strategies and keeping ideas and lessons fresh to benefit academic planning. Teacher M stated, “I [enjoyed doing] things my own way, but collaboration [was] excellent for new perspectives on lessons promoting team work.”

Self-contained teacher participants also discussed the disadvantages concerning academic planning for kindergarten through second grade. All self-contained teacher participants voiced the disadvantage of time spent on planning in kindergarten through second grade. Teacher F mentioned, “more time is spent planning in a self-contained classroom; however, you connect subjects better.” Out of the self-contained teacher participants, seven of the individuals stated the departmentalized organizational structure was preferred only because of the time spent planning was less. Teacher C stated, “I usually have to stay 1-2 hours daily after school to keep up with the work it takes to prepare for the next day.” Other participants voiced the feeling of being constantly rushed through the planning process and the instructional day which led to increased levels of stress in kindergarten through second grade teachers. Teacher I shared, “[I] feel my lesson is spread thin. I’m not teaching as in-depth as I would like.” Sixty-seven percent of the self-contained teacher participants stated it was very difficult to plan for all subjects. The participants were asked to estimate how many hours were spent on planning each week. The following responses were open coded by this researcher. Teacher O did not answer a direct amount of time and was unsure how much time the individual spent planning and preparing therefore the time was not documented (see Figure 2).





*Figure 2.* Hours Spent Planning for Self-contained Teachers.

The self-contained teachers determined time spent on planning was greatly increased as compared to the amount of time spent planning under the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade.

Other disadvantages that were determined by the teacher participants were professional learning communities were not as beneficial as intended. Teacher H stated, “county wide PLCs have not been of much use to me. [The PLCs were] just a lot of opinions tossed around with no real purpose.” Specifically, two participants felt PLCs were beneficial but found it difficult to implement many of the ideas that were introduced at each of the PLCs. According to Teacher J, “the experience was good. I learned some new things but finding the time to implement was a challenge.” Participants also discussed the possible disadvantage that sometimes existed in academic planning with others. Although most participants spoke highly of academic planning, some participants mentioned that

individuals are not as open and accepting to the ideas of others. Teacher M voiced, “some team members [might] not be on board with all your ideas” which could ultimately lead others to have negative perspectives concerning academic planning. Lastly, all teachers have different teaching styles. One participant explained that often teachers’ personalities will clash and “do not work well together” according to Teacher O. Personality differences could also lead to negative perspectives concerning academic planning

The following reoccurring categories of 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning were all important aspects of the self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. Based on the responses from teacher participants, this researcher determined the primary advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained organizational structure according to self-contained administrators in a kindergarten through second grade administrative role within a rural public school.

**Research question 3.** What were the reported perceptions of the administrators within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

This researcher open coded the administrator participant questionnaires who were an administrator under the departmentalized organizational structure. This researcher received six departmentalized administrator questionnaires. Three of the participants stated the building was departmentalized in kindergarten through second grade prior to when the individual became administrator. The remaining administrators noted teacher certification, teacher requests, and state-

mandated test results for the other reasons the decision was made to adopt the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade.

This researcher assigned each participant a corresponding letter to represent each participant and responses. This researcher open coded the departmentalized administrators' questionnaires and determined ten codes from the questionnaires. This researcher then determined the following three primary categories: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning.

The first category determined by this researcher was classroom transition. Classroom transition represented the time spent switching to a different task, subject, or teacher with a group of students. Classroom transition was determined to be an important factor because all administrator participants discussed the advantages of being a departmentalized teacher. The second category determined by this researcher was teacher and student relationships. Teacher and student relationships referred to the participants' experiences of the relationships with each student in the classroom. All participants continuously discussed the importance of the lack of strong relationships between the teacher and students under the departmentalized organizational structure. The participants also discussed the disadvantages of having so many students during the school day and how it is difficult to learn about each student well enough to make a true academic impact. Academic planning was the final category determined and referred to the process of teachers planning individually or collaboratively with other teachers to prepare for classroom lessons. Administrators determined the advantages associated with departmentalized teachers that planned for fewer

subjects. Each category was presented in the departmentalized administrators' responses, and this researcher determined advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized organizational structure specifically in kindergarten through second grade based on the administrators' responses.

The first category determined from the coding process was classroom transition. Classroom transition presented itself as a disadvantage of the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. All participants agreed that classroom transition is time-consuming and much more difficult to accomplish with kindergarten through second grade, especially in kindergarten. Several administrators discussed the increase of negative behaviors whenever classroom transitions occurred. Administrator B argued under the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade, classroom transitions allowed for less structure, "which [allowed] for greater possibility of negative behaviors." Of the administrators, four participants noted that loss of time was possible, however it was up to the teachers' routines and procedures that determined how much instructional time was lost due to classroom transitions. According to Administrator F "teachers must have great classroom management to be efficient to avoid loss in time." Administrator C agreed, "time can be lost but an efficient teacher can quickly remedy that by having plans and materials in place. If a teacher is structured the students will learn quickly what is expected of them; a routine." Although classroom transition was mostly reported as a disadvantage in kindergarten through second grade according to administrators, there were some advantages that were common among the participant responses. The advantages that were

determined considered the mental breaks it allowed for the students throughout the day. Administrator D stated, “transition times [allowed] students to get more movement into their day.” According to Administrator E, “students benefit from movement and the loss in time for transition will gain more focus.”

The second reoccurring category determined was teacher and student relationships. Administrator participants presented differing perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of teacher and student relationships within the departmentalized organizational structure. The category of teacher and student relationships was presented mostly as a disadvantage with some advantages mentioned collectively by many of the administrator participants concerning the departmentalized kindergarten through second grade classroom. Administrator participants stated the importance of strong teacher and student relationships throughout given responses, but overall determined there is a lack of strong relationships between the teacher and students under departmentalization. According to Administrator D, “the relationships may not be as strong as if a teacher had the same students all day.” Of the participants, two individuals discussed the possibilities of negative student behavior that took place when students as young as kindergarten through second grade students attempted to thrive under a departmentalized organizational structure. According to Administrator B, “sometimes teacher/student personalities conflict. The students would suffer from this if the teacher [was] not capable of developing strategies to correct the situation.” However, four participants discussed the advantages of teacher and student relationships under the departmentalized organizational structure and explained the resilience of young students. Administrator C stated,

“sometimes there are situations where a student might need just one person to connect with. At first, it can be overwhelming to switch classes, but they do catch on quickly.” Lastly, the final advantage that was determined was the students were given the opportunity to build relationships with multiple teachers instead of just one. According to Administrator D, “students [were] able to build relationships with more than one teacher. This [allowed for] extra support structures, more connection, and more role models.”

The final category this researcher determined was academic planning. Academic planning was determined important to all administrator participants based on the questionnaire responses. With regards to academic planning, all administrator participants required departmentalized teachers in kindergarten through second grade to participate in collaborative planning. Each administrator emphasized the importance of collaborative planning with one another in order to be most beneficial to the students. The administrator participants commonly discussed more time allowed to plan and focus on content as the primary advantage of the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. According to the participants, under the departmentalized organizational structure, teachers spent more time creating lessons that were more individualized for the students. According to Administrator C, “teachers [focused] on a specific subject and therefore [taught] more in-depth. I think it is also better for the students because they can have different teachers and develop relationships.” Participants voiced that although the departmentalized structure allowed more time to plan, departmentalized teachers often spent this extra preparation time to plan more lesson centered around the students’ needs and

allowed the teachers to go more in depth. Administrator E stated, “planning [had] more opportunity to be differentiated for students. The basis can be the same but individual needs can have more focus.” Other participants agreed. Administrator B stated, “I would assume that less time is devoted to planning per subject area. However, more time could be devoted to planning for differentiation.” Therefore, academic planning had perceived advantages determined by the departmentalized administrator participants. Participants also discussed the decrease of subjects to plan for led to lowered stress levels involved in planning. Therefore, this allowed the departmentalized teachers to have more focus on planning lessons for students. Teacher D emphasized, “teachers [felt] less stressed with only having to plan/find resources for one or two subjects. Therefore, they can become more specialized.”

The following reoccurring categories of 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning were all determined to be important aspects of the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. Based on the responses from the administrators, this researcher determined the most prominent and categories that were common among the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized organizational structure according to departmentalized administrators in a kindergarten through second grade administrative role within a rural public school.

**Research question 4.** What were the reported perceptions of the teachers within an East Tennessee school district regarding the advantages and

disadvantages of departmentalized classroom in kindergarten through second grade?

This researcher received ten departmentalized kindergarten through second grade teacher participant questionnaires. Of the participants, three were kindergarten teachers, three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, and one participant taught first and second grade. There were four teachers who taught ELA, one teacher taught ELA combined with writing, the remaining five teachers taught math. Of the math teachers, 80% of the participants taught math and science or social studies. This researcher then open coded the teacher participants' responses for type of departmentalization. Of the ten participants, four teachers were under a semi-departmentalized structure (two teachers covered four content areas), five participants taught within a group of three teachers (reading, writing, and math), and one participant was under pure departmentalization (four teachers covered four content areas).

The study had ten departmentalized kindergarten through second grade teacher participants. This researcher gave kindergarten through second grade teachers a letter that corresponded to represent each participant. This researcher open coded the departmentalized teachers' questionnaires and determined six codes from the questionnaires. After the codes were determined by this researcher, this researcher then developed the following categories: 1) teacher and student relationships, 2) classroom transition, and 3) academic planning. These categories encompassed the advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized classroom according to departmentalized teachers.



This researcher assigned each participant a corresponding letter to represent each participant and responses. This researcher used the codes to develop the three categories based on kindergarten through second grade teacher perceptions of the departmentalized classroom. This researcher determined the following categories: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning.

The first category determined by this researcher was classroom transition. Classroom transition represented the time spent switching to a different task, subject, or teacher with a group of students. Classroom transition was determined to be a disadvantage under the departmentalized organizational structure. The second category determined by this researcher was teacher and student relationships. Teacher and student relationships referred to the participants' experiences of the relationships with each student in the classroom. All participants discussed the importance in the lack of strong relationships between the teacher and students under the departmentalized structure in kindergarten through second grade. The participants also discussed the disadvantages of the teachers having the same students all day and how that could negatively impact the teacher and student relationship. Academic planning was the final category determined and referred to the process of teachers planning individually or collaboratively with other teachers to prepare for classroom lessons. Teachers perceived the disadvantages associated with the requirement to plan for all subjects and the difficulty associated with doing so. Each category was presented in the departmentalized teachers' responses, and this researcher determined both

categories as advantages of the departmentalized organizational structure specifically in kindergarten through second grade.

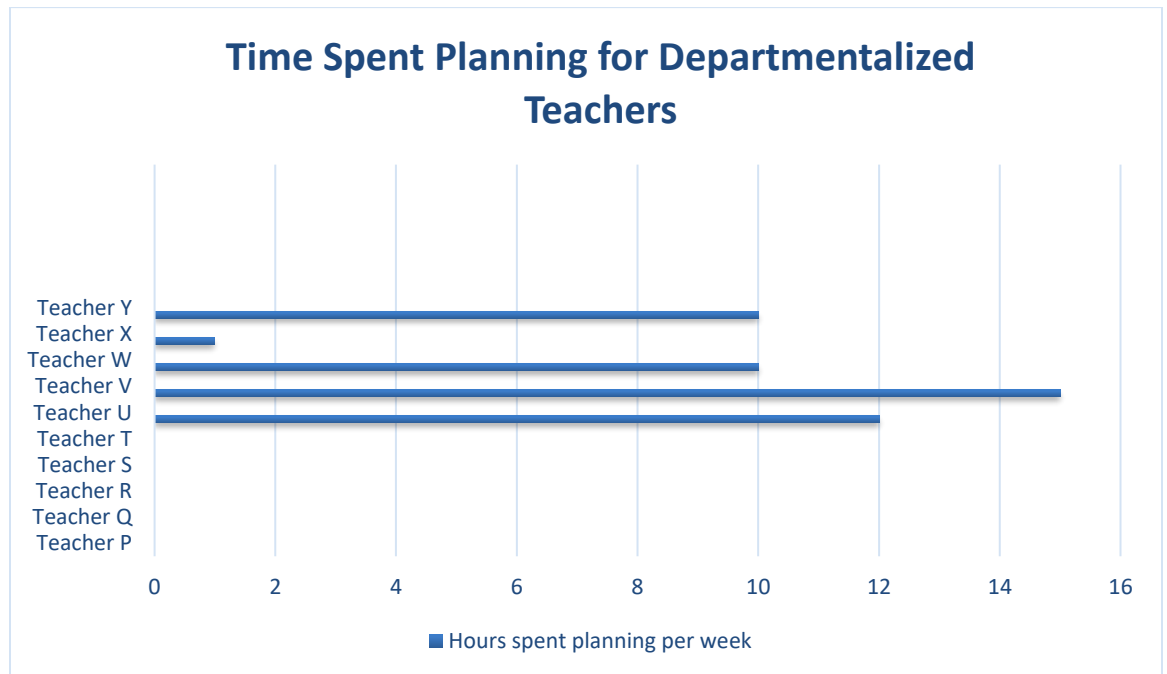
The first emerging category according to departmentalized teachers was classroom transitions. There were mixed reviews from teacher participants regarding classroom transitions as an advantage or disadvantage. Out of the ten participants, 50% of the individuals spoke positively of classroom transitions, while the remaining 50% discussed the disadvantages associated with classroom transitions. The individuals who discussed the advantages of classroom transitions cited the benefits of 1) kindergarten through second grade students were flexible, 2) students enjoyed switching classes and teachers, and 3) younger students needed movement. According to Teacher Q, “students enjoy moving from class to class. They get quicker as the year progresses.” Teacher V argued, “[kindergarten through second grade] students transition quickly and know their routine.” However, two participants voiced the importance of the teacher having procedures and routines in place for the classroom to transition as efficiently as possible. For the participants who discussed the disadvantages of classroom transition, the following concerns were mentioned: 1) some students did not function well under a strict schedule, 2) students felt burnt out, 3) more time is wasted on classroom transitions, and 4) difficult to calm students back down after changing classes. According to Teacher Q, “it [was] sometimes difficult to get students to pack up/line up quickly and quietly change classes and get calmed back down.” According to Teacher U, “students may get [burnt] out sometimes.” Other teachers discussed some kindergarten through second grade students did not benefit from the departmentalized organizational structure. Teacher Y stated, “I

believe students can do well with routines. However, not all students do well with strict routines.” Teacher P, a kindergarten departmentalized teacher stated, “some class time is always lost in kindergarten transition time.” Lastly, Teacher X explained, “more time is taken for bathroom breaks and students moving.”

The second category was teacher and student relationships. Relationships were presented with many perceived disadvantages as compared to advantages under the departmentalized structure. Out of the ten departmentalized teachers, only 20% responded that they knew the students “very well.” Participant V, who spoke positively about teacher and student relationships, stated, “I try my best to form positive relationships with all my students so they feel they can talk to me about anything.” Participant Y agreed but believed “more time with one class would strengthen those relationships.” The remaining participants discussed disadvantages that surrounded teacher and student relationships. Most participants shared they do not know the students as well as before the school adopted the departmentalized organizational structure. Of the participants, five participants mentioned the students who struggle and wished for one time with the students to improve skills. Teacher Q added, “I don’t feel like I get to really know each student. I don’t know their interests/hobbies as well as I would like to.”

The final category that emerged from the departmentalized teacher responses was academic planning. This researcher determined from the questionnaire results, departmentalized teachers perceived academic planning as an advantage. All participants spoke positively of academic planning and gave examples of how the individual and the team planned together during the week. All teacher participants detailed what occurred during the weekly meeting with

one another. According to Teacher S, “[teachers] collaborate with [the] team weekly to discuss student progress and anything else that needs to be addressed.” Teacher T discussed the academic planning that occurred weekly and stated, “my team collaborates once a week to discuss content being taught throughout the week. We also make sure we are covering the standards in our content week to week.” Of the participants, nine spoke positively of the amount of time teachers spent being able to collaborate with teachers in other grade levels. Teacher R explained, “there is more time to meet with other grade levels to meet with teachers who teach the same subject. It makes vertical planning much easier.” This researcher determined time spent planning was another commonly perceived advantage under the departmentalized organizational structure according to kindergarten through second grade teachers. This researcher open coded the responses given by departmentalized kindergarten through second grade teachers when asked how much time each teacher spent on planning. For teacher participants who have a time of zero hours represented, the participants did not give a specific amount of time (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Time Spent Planning for Departmentalized Kindergarten through Second Grade Teachers.

The following reoccurring categories of 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning are all important aspects of the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. Based on the responses from the administrators, this researcher determined the primary advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized organizational structure according to departmentalized teachers in a kindergarten through second grade administrative role within a rural public school.

### **Summary of Results**

This researcher discovered both advantages and disadvantages of both organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade according to the perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized administrators and teachers within a rural public-school district. The results of perceived advantages and

disadvantages of both the self-contained and departmentalized organizational structures were consistent from the administrators and teachers. Categories of teacher and students relationships, classroom transition, and academic planning were presented with evidence from individuals in schools that adopted either the self-contained or departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. The emerging categories from the data collection process were similar among both administrators and teachers from each of the organizational structure. This researcher conducted data analysis and developed 45 codes that ultimately determined the three categories that functioned as the focus of this study. Consistency occurred across all participant responses that there were reported advantages and disadvantages of the self-contained and the departmentalized organizational structures, according to the self-contained and departmentalized kindergarten through second grade teachers.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Concerns of organizational structures became more pronounced in elementary schools across the United States as academic achievement was deemed the primary responsibility of the classroom teacher (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). Therefore, elementary schools began to restructure the way classrooms were organized to increase student achievement (Aliakbari & Nejad, 2013; Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). Although there was existing research on organizational structures in elementary schools, there was a limited extant body of research concerning organizational structures specifically in kindergarten through second grade (ASCD, 2011; Baker, 2011; Chang et al., 2008; Glennon et al., 2013; Liu, 2011; Minott, 2016; Ornstein, 2011; Strohl et al., 2014). This researcher determined the two most popular organizational structures in elementary schools during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was: 1) departmentalization and 2) self-contained (Baker, 2011; Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967). Departmentalization was referred to as a qualified teacher who provided instruction on a single subject to several groups of students throughout the school day and was among the most popular non-traditional classroom organizational structures (Baker, 2011). Traditional self-contained was defined as one teacher being responsible for all core subjects for the same group of students daily (Johnson, 2013).

In order to further expand the existing body of literature concerning organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade, this researcher conducted a study within an East Tennessee public school district to determine perceived advantages and disadvantages of the departmentalized and self-contained structures according to kindergarten through second grade

administrators and teachers. The school district experimented with the departmentalized organizational structure in grades as low as kindergarten five years prior to this study in order to determine the most ideal organizational structure for kindergarten through second grade students and teachers. This researcher reported the perceived advantages and disadvantages from kindergarten through second grade teachers and administrators to the school district in order to help the district make a more informed and research-based decision in the adoption process of organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade moving forward.

### **Discussion and Conclusions of the Study**

This researcher determined three categories were consistent across questionnaires and were discussed among kindergarten through second grade teachers and administrators alike. The three reoccurring categories were also consistent with the review of literature concerning organizational structures in public elementary schools within the United States. The following three reoccurring categories existed within the study: 1) classroom transition, 2) teacher and student relationships, and 3) academic planning.

Classroom transition represented the time spent switching to a different task, subject, or teacher with a group of students. Classroom transition was presented as an advantage by administrators and kindergarten through second grade teachers under the self-contained structure because little classroom transition time was lost. According to administrators and teachers: 1) little to no time was lost during transitions, 2) transitions were nearly seamless under the self-contained organizational structure, and 3) daily schedules were able to be



altered by the classroom teacher. Classroom transition was presented as a disadvantage under the departmentalized organizational structure because 1) more instructional time is wasted when students are transitioned to a different teacher and classroom, 2) time consuming and more difficult to accomplish with kindergarten through second grade students, 3) some students did not function well under a strict schedule, 4) students felt burnt out, and 5) it was difficult to calm students back down after transitioning from another classroom. These findings were consistent with the findings of other research conducted on organizational structures in elementary schools that determined the self-contained organizational structure took up the least amount of instructional time as compared to the departmentalized organizational structure (Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967; McGrath & Rust, 2002; Thornell, 1980; Walters, 1970).

Teacher and student relationships was the second category gleaned from the findings. Teacher and student relationships referred to the participants' experiences of the relationships with each student in the classroom. This researcher's findings were consistent with preceding research that determined teachers had opportunities to guide and support students' emotional and psychological development by having more time available to develop relationships with students (Lee et al., 2016; Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967; Thornell, 1980; Walters, 1970). Baker (2011) and Patton (2003) determined teachers who had the same students all day better identified the students who may have struggles that stem from home. Teacher and student relationships were presented as an advantage of the self-contained classroom according to administrators and teachers because the participants perceived stronger relationships with students

due to spending more time with them during the instructional day. Participants alike determined the following perceived advantages of teacher and student relationships within the self-contained organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade: 1) relationships in kindergarten through second grade are very important in child development, 2) parents felt more closely bonded to the teachers, 3) teachers were able to more efficiently determine student academic needs, learning styles, and differentiate instruction, 4) more discipline within the classroom, 5) better follow through concerning discipline, 6) improved student behavior resulting in less consequences, and 7) only one set of rules of procedures for students to learn and follow. Findings were consistent with the review of literature conducted by this researcher that determined that students who had a strong relationship with teachers was a strong advantage of the self-contained structure (Bezeua, 2007; Chang et al., 2008; Schonert-Reichl, & Zakrzewski, 2014). Teacher and student relationships were presented as a disadvantage under the departmentalized structure. Although most of the departmentalized teachers felt the teachers knew the students well, the participants felt they would know the students better under the self-contained organizational structure. The findings were consistent with research that determined teacher and student relationships as a disadvantage and a major concern of the departmentalized organizational structure in elementary school (Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 2007; Liu, 2011).

Academic planning was the third and final category revealed in kindergarten through second grade administrators' and teachers' responses. Academic planning referred to the process of teachers planning individually or collaboratively with other teachers to prepare for classroom lessons. Academic

planning was presented as a disadvantage under the self-contained organizational structure because of the extra time required by teachers to spend planning for all the subjects instead of one or two subjects. This finding was consistent with prior research conducted where time spent planning under the self-contained organizational structure was determined to be a disadvantage (Andrews, 2006; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Gerretson et al., 2008; Varma & Hanusein; 2008). Self-contained elementary teachers did not have the time to plan individualized educational interventions and enrichment for every subject that teachers were required to teach (Andrews, 2006; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Gerretson et al., 2008; Varma & Hanusein; 2008). Although academic planning was presented as a disadvantage, administrator and teacher participants shared the advantages of academic planning under the self-contained organization structure included the benefit of collaborative planning and increased teacher knowledge of students. Academic planning was determined by this researcher as an overwhelming advantage under the departmentalized organizational structure according to administrators and kindergarten through second grade teachers. Findings were consistent with prior research concerning academic planning under the departmentalized organizational structure. Academic planning was determined by other researchers as an advantage because elementary teachers were perceived to have more time to focus on less subjects and spent less time overall planning for those subjects (Liu, 2011; Strohl, 2014).

### **Implications for Practice**

The current study served as a piece of research to expand the extant literature regarding organizational structures in kindergarten through second

grade. An East Tennessee school district participated in this study in order to determine the most ideal and effective organizational structure for kindergarten through second grade students within a rural public elementary school. The findings were beneficial for the school district that participated however other school districts interested in determining the most ideal organizational structure for kindergarten through second grade could benefit as well from the research. The following recommendations were presented in order of most beneficial to school districts interested in the research:

1. This researcher recommended that school districts provide better opportunities for teacher and student relationship improvements under the departmentalized organizational structure. School district personnel, administrators, and teachers would need to work closely together to create opportunities to build stronger relationships between the teachers and students. School districts would also benefit from professional development opportunities that cover research-based strategies to build stronger teacher and student relationships. Lack of strong teacher and student relationships was determined to be a disadvantage under the departmentalized organizational structure. This finding was consistent with other research performed in determining effective organizational structures in elementary schools (Andrews, 2006; Chan & Jarman, 2004; Gerretson et al., 2008; Varma & Hanusein; 2008).
2. This researcher recommended that school districts place more emphasis on professional development opportunities to allow teachers to become more trained in organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade.

Kindergarten through second grade administrators and teachers alike shared concerns of lost transition time under the departmentalized organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade.

Professional development opportunities would allow teachers the classroom management strategies and skills to help the departmentalized organizational structure to be more efficient at this age of students.

3. This researcher recommended policy makers and school districts place more focus on teachers allowed more time and training on management of planning rather than just solely on organizational structures. If teachers had more applicable trainings on how to manage time and planning under each of the organizational structures, teachers would be able to better enhance student learning opportunities, no matter what organizational structure teachers were under. This would benefit both types of teachers, however self-contained teachers would benefit more because teachers could spend less time planning lessons and preparing materials. This researcher determined this to be a major concern for kindergarten through second grade teachers.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Additional research conducted comparing the effectiveness of organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade would be beneficial for school districts and administrators interested in experimenting with the departmentalized organizational structure. Future researchers interested in determining the most ideal organizational structure for kindergarten through second grade classrooms could add to the extant research specifically by

including a comparable or larger sample size and a more diverse population. This study had a relatively smaller sample size of administrators and teachers. If the study included a more diverse sample size and larger population, researchers would be able to expand the extant research concerning organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade. Therefore, the research could further inform those individuals who would be interested and would benefit from the future findings. Further research could determine if there was a difference in perceived advantages and disadvantages according to the different populations of individuals. By doing so, researchers interested in the topic of organizational structures in kindergarten through second grade could determine the advantages and disadvantages of a larger population of participants. Furthermore, school districts could better determine the most effective and ideal organizational structure for kindergarten through second grade since the district would be more informed and knowledgeable of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms.

Further research could be conducted in different school districts that are not traditional public rural school districts located within the Southeast Tennessee region (i.e. private elementary schools, or charter elementary schools). School districts could then compare the perceptions of administrators and teachers in kindergarten through second grade across the United States to further add to the extant literature concerning organizational structures in elementary schools. Furthermore, other researchers could use a multitude of other data collection methods including classroom observations, administrator interviews, or teacher interviews rather than solely using administrator and teacher questionnaires. By

using administrator and teacher interviews and classroom observations, researchers could further compare results and justify findings from other studies previously conducted. Researchers could further determine reasons for perceived advantages and disadvantages of each organizational structure according to administrators and teachers.

Another recommendation for future research would be to examine administrator and teacher perceptions of school structure within suburban and urban school districts. The researchers could compare findings to this study and determine if the results were consistent among rural and urban/suburban school districts and if the perceived advantages and disadvantages of administrators and teachers were shared among both rural and urban/suburban school districts. Student populations would be more diverse possibly leading to different results than found in this study. A larger number of school districts would then be able to have a larger extant body of research that was more consistent to the school district dynamic to further help determine the most ideal organizational structure in kindergarten through second grade. Studies conducted within the same and different types of areas would add to the reliability and validity of the findings within this study.

Lastly, further research could be conducted to determine the advantages and disadvantages of each organizational structure over an extended period. This study was conducted over a short period of time to determine at the time, the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each organizational structure. However, if the study had lasted a longer period, further research could be conducted to see if the results were consistent from different times throughout the

academic year. Researchers could determine in what ways, if any, organizational structures altered student academic achievement in the future, and further added to the extant literature concerning early childhood and overall student development. Researchers could research the effects on student's overall academic achievement, after the child exited elementary school. The more in-depth literature and research that is conducted, the more knowledgeable school personnel can become on making the decision to either departmentalize or remain self-contained in kindergarten through second grade.



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**Appendix A**  
**Departmentalized Administrator Questionnaire**

## Departmentalized Administrator Questionnaire

If you agree to answer this questionnaire, please use a check mark on the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am over 18 years of age.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, by completing this questionnaire, I am giving permission for my answers to

to be used for research purposes.

### *Departmentalized Administrator*

**Part I:** Please answer the following questions regarding the organizational structure of your building and the requirements for planning.

\*Which model of departmentalization does your building practice in grades kindergarten through second grade?

- A) Semi-Departmentalized (2 teachers covering 4 content areas)
- B) Semi-Departmentalized (Each teacher teaches reading; rest of content areas departmentalized)
- C) Pure Departmentalization (4 teachers covering 4 content areas)
- D) Other Departmentalization structure

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\_\_\_\_\_

\*How did you determine which model(s) of departmentalization to practice within your building? Select all that apply.

- A) I did research on each model of departmentalization and determined this model most effective.
- B) The building was departmentalized when I became principal.
- C) The teachers requested to be departmentalized.
- D) Based on the state mandated test results, departmentalization was most appropriate.
- E) Based on the years of experience or training of my teachers, departmentalization was most appropriate.
- F) Other.

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\*How did you determine which teachers would teach which content areas? Select all that apply.

A) Degree received. (Example: must have some literacy degree to teach reading)

B) Request of the teacher

C) Need for a person in that position

D) Years of experience

E) Prior state mandated test results for the teacher

F) Other.

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\*Do you require teachers to participate in collaborative planning? A) Yes B) No

1. Please explain, outside of the school day hours, how much time your teachers spend planning, grading, and/or communicating with parents.

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2. Please describe your feelings on if you feel your teachers enjoy the profession of teaching and the current organizational structure they are under.

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3. Please describe your feelings (if any) about why you prefer the self-contained structure used within kindergarten through second grades.

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4. Please describe your feelings (if any) about why you would prefer the departmentalized structure over the self-contained structure.

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**Part II:** For the following statements, evaluate the level of advantage the departmentalized structure has within at least one grade level.

5. When reflecting on the model of departmentalized organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the advantages (if any) concerning the relationships with students.

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6. When reflecting on the model of departmentalized organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the disadvantages (if any) concerning the relationships with students.

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7. When reflecting on the model of departmentalized organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the advantages (if any) concerning the amount of time required for planning.

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8. When reflecting on the model of departmentalized organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the disadvantages (if any) concerning the amount of time required for planning.

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9. When reflecting on the model of departmentalized organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the advantages (if any) in transition time.
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10. When reflecting on the model of departmentalized organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the disadvantages (if any) in transition time.

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11. Please describe if you feel students are more engaged when they appear to enjoy school.

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**Appendix B**  
**Departmentalized Teacher Questionnaire**

## Departmentalized Teacher Questionnaire

If you agree to answer this questionnaire, please use a check mark on the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am over 18 years of age.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, by completing this questionnaire, I am giving permission for my answers to be used for research purposes.

### *Departmentalized Teacher*

What grade level(s) do you teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

What subject(s) do you teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part I:** Please answer the following questions regarding the organizational structure of your classroom and the requirements for planning.

\*Which model of departmentalization do you teach within?

A) Semi-Departmentalized (2 teachers covering 4 content areas)

B) Semi-Departmentalized (Each teacher teaches reading; rest of content areas departmentalized)

C) Pure Departmentalization (4 teachers covering 4 content areas)

D) Other; Please describe.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\*Although you currently departmentalize, please describe if you would prefer to teach within a self-contained organization structure and why. Please provide an explanation of your response.

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**Part II:** Please answer the following questions regarding the organizational structure of your classroom and the requirements for planning.

12. If you participate in collaborative planning, such as a Professional Learning Community, please explain your role and experience in the process.

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**Part III:** Please respond to the following questions and statements.

13. Regarding the content areas you are required to teach, what educational training have you had to prepare you for your role?

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14. Please share what classes you teach, and how your content areas are divided throughout the day.

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15. Please explain, outside of the school day hours, how much time do you spend planning, grading, and/or communicating with parents.

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16. Please express how well you feel that you know your students.

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17. Please describe your feelings on if you enjoy the profession of teaching, and the current organizational structure you are under.

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18. Please describe how engaged you feel your students are during instructional time and examples of why you feel that way.

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**For the following statements, evaluate each of the following within the organizational structure you teach.**

19. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please describe some advantages (if any) concerning the relationships built with your students.

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20. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please describe some disadvantages (if any) concerning the relationships built with your students.

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21. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please explain the advantages (if any) of the amount of time required for planning.

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22. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please explain the disadvantages (if any) of the amount of time required for planning.

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23. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please describe the advantages (if any) in collaborative planning.

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24. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please describe the disadvantages (if any) in collaborative planning.

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25. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please describe the advantages (if any) in transition time.

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26. When reflecting on the departmentalized model you teach within, please describe the disadvantages (if any) in transition time.

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27. Please describe if you feel students are more engaged when they appear to enjoy school.

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**Appendix C**

**Self-Contained Administrator Questionnaire**



## Self-Contained Administrator Questionnaire

If you agree to answer this questionnaire, please use a check mark on the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am over 18 years of age.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, by completing this questionnaire, I am giving permission for my answers to be used for research purposes.

### *Self-Contained Administrator*

**Part I:** Please answer the following questions regarding the organizational structure of your building and the requirements for planning.

\*How did you determine a self-contained organization structure was best within kindergarten through second grades. Select all that apply.

- A) I did research on the self-contained structure versus the departmentalized structure and determined this model most effective.
- B) The building was self-contained when I became principal.
- C) The teachers requested to be self-contained.
- D) Based on the state mandated test results, self-contained was most appropriate.
- E) Based on the years of experience or training of my teachers, self-contained was most appropriate.
- F) Other.

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\*Do you require teachers to participate in collaborative planning? A) Yes B) No

Please explain, outside of the school day hours, how much time your teachers spend planning, grading, and/or communicating with parents.

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1. Please describe your feelings on if you feel your teachers enjoy the profession of teaching and the current organizational structure they are under.

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2. Please describe your feelings (if any) about why you prefer the self-contained structure used within kindergarten through second grades.

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3. Please describe your feelings (if any) about why you would prefer the self-contained structure over the departmentalized structure.

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**Part II:** For the following statements, evaluate the level of advantage the self-contained structure has within at least one grade level.

4. When reflecting on the model of self-contained organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the advantages (if any) concerning the relationships with students.

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5. When reflecting on the model of self-contained organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the disadvantages (if any) concerning the relationships with students.

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6. When reflecting on the model of self-contained organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the advantages (if any) concerning the amount of time required for planning.

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7. When reflecting on the model of self-contained organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the disadvantages (if any) concerning the amount of time required for planning.

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8. When reflecting on the model of self-contained organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the advantages (if any) in transition time.

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9. When reflecting on the model of self-contained organization within kindergarten through second grades, please describe the disadvantages (if any) in transition time.

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10. Please describe if you feel students are more engaged when they appear to enjoy school.

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## **Appendix D**

### **Self-Contained Teacher Questionnaire**

## Self-Contained Teacher Questionnaire

If you agree to answer this questionnaire, please use a check mark on the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am over 18 years of age.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, by completing this questionnaire, I am giving permission for my answers to be used for research purposes.

### *Self-Contained Teacher*

What grade level do you teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

\*Although you are currently self-contained, please describe if you would prefer to teach within a departmentalized organization structure and why.

Please provide an explanation of your response.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part I:** Please answer the following questions regarding the organizational structure of your classroom and the requirements for planning.

If you participate in collaborative planning, such as a Professional Learning Community, please explain your role and experience in the process.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part II:** Please respond to the following questions and statements.

1. Regarding the content areas you are required to teach, what educational training have you had to prepare you for your role?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Please share what classes you teach, and how your content areas are divided throughout the day.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Please explain, outside of the school day hours, how much time do you spend planning, grading, and/or communicating with parents.

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4. Please express how well you feel that you know your students.

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5. Please describe your feelings on if you enjoy the profession of teaching, and the current organizational structure you are under.

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6. Please describe how engaged you feel your students are during instructional time and examples of why you feel that way.

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**For the following statements, evaluate each of the following within the organizational structure you teach.**

7. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please describe some advantages (if any) concerning the relationships built with your students.

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8. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please describe some disadvantages (if any) concerning the relationships built with your students.

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9. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please explain the advantages (if any) of the amount of time required for planning.

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10. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please explain the disadvantages (if any) of the amount of time required for planning.

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11. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please describe the advantages (if any) in collaborative planning.

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12. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please describe the disadvantages (if any) in collaborative planning.

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13. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please describe the advantages (if any) in transition time.

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14. When reflecting on the self-contained model you teach within, please describe the disadvantages (if any) in transition time.

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15. Please describe if you feel students are more engaged when they appear to enjoy school.

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