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Departmentalizing at the Elementary Level

A LITERATURE REVIEW

By Cori McKenney

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Committee:

Alison K. Mercier, Assistant Professor, Chair

Christine Wade, Associate Professor

Cynthia Brock, Professor

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impacts of departmentalization on academic achievement, social emotional aspects, and behavioral aspects of elementary students. Data collected included student achievement data, student/ teacher connectedness data, and student behavioral data with both positive and negative impacts. Academic advancements have been impacted by many things. Educators and administrators face intensified pressure to significantly increase student achievement in their schools. Changing how schools and classrooms are organized for instruction, as a strategy for school improvement, has been one response to this pressure. Departmentalizing in the elementary school serves as one example of such an organizational change. Very little research, however, specifically addresses elementary-level departmentalization. The benefits and limitations of elementary departmentalization were researched.

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Dedication

This piece of work is dedicated to my dad, James M. McCue. You taught us to never give up, you told us if it is hard, it is probably worth doing, even in your darkest hour, you fought with all you had to keep going. I love you and I miss you, thank you for your amazing strength, your constant love, and never-ending support.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose.....	2
Statement of Problem.....	2
Research Question	3
Methodology.....	3
Significance.....	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
Introduction.....	5
Theoretical Foundation	5
Departmentalizing – An Organizational Structure	6
Positive Impacts of Departmentalization	7
Academic Impacts.....	7
Impacts on Social and Emotional Aspects.....	10
Impacts on Behavioral Aspects.....	11
Negative Impacts of Departmentalization	12
Academic Impacts.....	12

Impacts on Social and Emotional Aspects.....	14
Impacts on Behavioral Aspects.....	17
Chapter 3: Review of the Findings	18
Conclusion	20
References	21

Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational reform has been a concern for many years, Legislation has addressed this concern through assessment, autonomy, and accountability. In an effort to improve student learning and education, the following items were enacted, on April 9, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson put into effect the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This law was intended to increase the federal government's investment in K-12 education. The ESEA was an extensive statute that funded primary and secondary education, emphasizing high standards and accountability through the implementation of Title Programs such as: Programs and Services for Struggling Learners, Migrant Education, Institutional Education, Homeless Education, and many more (Paul, 2016).

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush put into effect the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This law was created out of a need to improve the United States ability to be internationally competitive. An act to close the achievement gap with stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents. The idea was to hold schools more accountable for student progress.

On December 10, 2015, Congress passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This law replaced the NCLB act set in place in 2002. The ESSA was designed to give more control to the states and the school districts, while lessening the power of the federal government. Students often face hardships beyond their control; disabilities, poverty, learning difficulties, mobility problems, transience, struggling to learn English as an additional language. The aforementioned Federal initiatives were made to address the same concerns, how to lessen negative impacts on

education, and improve student achievement overall. A common suggestion is to evaluate classroom organizational structures.

Purpose

In recent years my coworkers, our administrators, and I have discussed the idea of departmentalizing at the elementary level. Our exploration of the benefits and the repercussions of departmentalizing have not produced any solutions. We have been unable to determine what is best for students at the elementary level. The purpose of this extensive literature review is to gain a better understanding of how departmentalized classrooms impact elementary age students academically, socially, and behaviorally. This literature review is intended to support teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in making informed decisions about departmentalization that are in the best interests of students.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the rise in expectations of schools across the country and in order to meet the requirements of increased test scores and high-quality teachers established by the federal government, and the benchmarks set by the state government, school systems have been required to make changes to school curricular structures (Umpstead, 2008). These changes are designed to address three primary areas of focus: 1) testing, 2) teacher quality, and 3) failing test scores.

One change that was made to address these areas of concern is departmentalizing the elementary classrooms. Departmentalizing is most commonly seen in the secondary school systems; middle schools, junior highs, and high schools. It is less often seen at the elementary level but is used in some instances. Departmentalization is an organizational structure that separates people into groups, or departments. In a school system, departmentalization means

students receive instruction from several different individuals in a single day (Chang et al., 2008).

Research Question

This literature review was guided by the following question: According to the literature, in what ways does departmentalizing elementary classrooms impact students?

Methodology

The process for this extensive literature review consisted of research, evaluation, data collection, and combining of information and facts from numerous peer-reviewed articles on the academic, social emotional, and behavior impacts of departmentalizing at the elementary level. To gather enough relevant and valid publications, I conducted numerous online searches of databases such as Ebscohost, ProQuest, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Education Source. I researched these databases using key words such as, *departmentalization, departmentalizing at the elementary level, the impact of departmentalizing at a young level, how to meet the academic needs of elementary age students, and the significance of student teacher relationships*. I focused the majority of my research on literature that covered the upper elementary grade levels, 4-6, with a few in surrounding grade levels for comparison. I chose the upper elementary grades because of the connection to my personal interest in the outcomes. After reviewing the collected literature, I categorized the review into two sections - positive and negative impacts of departmentalizing. I focused on three subtopics: 1) academic impacts, 2) social/emotional impacts, and 3) behavioral impacts. The impacts on these subtopics became the focus for each section of my literature review.

Significance

I chose to research the topic of departmentalizing at the elementary level because the school I am currently at, a K-6 school, and is considering this transition for our sixth graders. There is little research as to whether a departmentalized model is developmentally appropriate for younger students. Therefore, I want to make sure it is the best decision for them. I want to know what kind of impacts departmentalizing has on academics, does it help, or hurt testing scores? I want to know if students are impacted socially, do they still feel that close connectedness they get in a self-contained classroom? I also want to know how it affects them behaviorally. Is it stressful, are they mature enough for the transition, and do they prefer this design? The school environment and its culture play an important role in students' ability to connect to learning. It is important for students at the elementary age to feel connected to their peers, their teachers, and their school (Chan et al., 2009).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Determining the most ideal academic setting for students to be successful is a primary goal of educators. Does the classroom structure impact academic gains? The literature (see e.g., Chan, Terry, Bessette, and Harris) says yes, but which is better, departmentalizing or maintaining a self-contained classroom? Should age be a determining factor? As expectations rise for students and schools to continue to make academic gains while following the ever-changing curricular standards, the debate over which instructional model works best has once again been brought to the forefront of educational reform (Freiberg, 2014). Due to the recent interest and attention, nationwide studies on education have moved to giving states the flexibility to design a system, with strategies, that holds their schools accountable for improving student achievement. Departmentalizing as organized instruction is one of the strategies being implemented. However, there is very little evidence supporting the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of departmentalizing versus the self-contained classroom at the elementary level. The jury is still out.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework that serves as the foundation and lens for this literature review was Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1987). Abraham Maslow was an American clinical psychologist who became famous after developing his theory on the Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs is a theory that people are motivated by five basic needs: 1) physiological, 2) safety, 3) love and belonging, 4) esteem, and 5) self-actualization.

These needs can also be explained in an educational format, referencing the connection to each need or level. For example, when looking at Maslow's theory, the impacts of

departmentalizing relate back to two needs in particular. The third level of human needs is a social need, which includes love and belonging. In a self-contained classroom, students are more likely to develop their skills in a social context through interactions with adults. Creating the bond that students and teachers have when spending hours each day together. Maslow (1987) believed that the need for interpersonal relationships is what motivated behavior, some examples of this are friendships, intimacy, trust, and acceptance. These are achieved through receiving and giving affection and love, by creating a sense of belonging, and being part of a group like family and friends. The fifth level of human needs is self-actualization. Maslow explicitly defined self-actualization to be "the desire to become everything one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1987, p. 64). An individual who reaches the stage of self-actualization is capable of reaching their full potential as a human being. A basic need of early adolescents is to feel competent. School organization, curriculum, and the nature of instruction foster or limit how students feel about achievement and competence (MacIver, 1993).

Departmentalizing, an Organizational Structure

Departmentalization is a common organizational structure used most often in secondary schools. In this setting, students receive instruction from several different teachers. These teachers specialize in teaching one or two subjects to multiple classes of students (Chang et al., 2008). The teacher is often more proficient in the content area they are instructing. The students rotate from room to room, six to seven times a day and receive instruction on different content areas that are often not conceptually connected to one another (Schumacher, 1995).

Studies (see Strohl et al., 2014; Markworth et al., 2016; Chan et al., 2008) say departmentalizing at the elementary level can have both positive and negative impacts on

students. Some of these impacts include: a) academic achievement, b) social emotional aspects, and c) behavioral issues.

Academic achievement is the progression of academic growth in a specific content area. The social emotional aspects represent the feelings of closeness and connectedness to school, teachers, and peers. Maslow (1987) explains that students will not progress at an optimal rate until their self-esteem is high/strong enough to go on. The behavioral issues are the concerns for students who act out in a less favorable manner due to frustrations often brought on by or at school. The next section will talk about the impact's departmentalization has, both positively and negatively on all three of these areas.

Positive Impacts of Departmentalization

Some studies (see Strohl et al., 2014; Liu, 2011; Markworth et al., 2016) say departmentalizing at the elementary level is an organizational structure that benefits students more than the self-contained classroom. Individuals straight out of high school are lacking in certain skills. The way to address these skills is through departmentalizing at a younger age (Watts, 2012). Departmentalizing allows for students to receive specialized instruction that aids in discipline tracking, and familiarizes the students with the educational structure they will see in middle school, junior high and high school (Harris, 1996). The remainder of this section focuses on what the literature says about how departmentalization positively impacts elementary students.

Academic Impacts

The literature cites many positive impacts of departmentalization when it comes to students' academics. One process is academic or content specialization. Academic or content

specialization is the process of becoming an expert in a particular area of knowledge. In a study by Markworth and colleagues (2016) which included fifteen schools in six different districts, grades kindergarten through fifth grade, they established the importance of becoming an expert in a particular area of knowledge. The study consisted of thirty-four content specialists in elementary mathematics and science, whom all taught two or more groups of students. Explaining that because teachers focus on specific content, they have time to develop more in-depth cohesive lesson plans. The results of this study showed that teachers who were specializing in specific content areas, were able to attend professional development specific to their content area, and work as a team to evaluate and address student needs. Receiving instruction from a teacher who has deep content knowledge and complex instructional skills in subjects like mathematics and science is a huge advantage for students (Markworth et al., 2016).

Another study, by Anderson (1962) stated “the deeper the teacher's understanding of his subject, the greater the likelihood of excellent instruction” (p. 254). This study explained the guidelines for the division of the students and the staff. They studied: the teachers’ ability and education level in specific content areas, the teachers’ ability to teach fast, average, or slow learners, and the students' individual ability levels. The focus was getting specialized teachers to teach what they know so the students have the best learning opportunities. “Most children in the United States are instructed by teachers who are not experts in every field they teach” (Anderson, 1962, p. 253).

Strohl and colleagues (2014) emphasized the workload of teachers being significantly lower in the departmentalized setting. Teachers reported spending less time planning, because they were only responsible for one or two content areas versus the five to six in a self-contained classroom. Strohl et al. (2014) agreed that narrowing a teacher’s scope of instruction from many

subjects to one, allows them to become more proficient in teaching that area. Some positive effects from this are, increased teacher attitude, improved instructional style, better use of instructional time, and increased scores on state test achievement. Markworth et al. (2011) explained that teachers are able to elaborate more on those one to two content areas they teach, enriching them with more information and activities. The teachers are less burnt out by heavy workloads in a departmentalized setting, “Relief from preparing for one content area seems to free up time for content areas of specialization” (Markworth, 2011, p. 11).

In a departmentalized setting students benefit from exposure to multiple teachers and multiple teaching styles while preparing for the transition to middle school or junior high. The classrooms are less cluttered with materials and supplies for multiple subjects, rather just the one subject the teacher is focusing on (Watts, 2012).

Chan and colleagues (2009) focused on fourth and fifth grade transition to middle school, emphasizing the main points for supporting departmentalizing in elementary schools; teachers are specialized in their area of instruction, allowing students the opportunity for discipline tracking that suits their needs and abilities. Discipline tracking, is the leveled grouping of students based on their academic achievement (NASSP, 2022). At the middle school and junior high-level, students have the opportunity to choose classes, and expand on their personal interests (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1993). Loveless (2002) explained that in the departmentalized setting, discipline tracking becomes more of an option, successful students follow a higher-level educational path while struggling students follow a lower-level path, with the expectation that all students can perform according to their ability and motivation levels. Students are subject to move up or down based on their success rate. Discipline tracking also makes teaching easier; teachers focus their lessons on specific levels of instruction.

Harris (1996) emphasized that students in the departmentalized setting were held more accountable for their own success, they tended to miss less school because of the rigid schedule they were expected to keep. In a self-contained classroom students have one teacher who is able to connect content across subjects, in a departmentalized setting this is less likely to happen and students have to do work for each subject on different content every day. When departmentalizing teachers only teach one to two subjects, allowing them more time to learn and perfect their knowledge of those specific areas to become content specialists. Students are therefore receiving higher quality education because of the knowledge level of the teacher (Harris, 1996). A study done by Goldhaber and colleagues (2013) showed improvement in math scores of 0.059–0.073 standard deviations due in part to students receiving specialized math instruction. The study was performed on self-contained, general curriculum classrooms in grades 3–5 with fewer than 29 students. It included information on student performance on standardized tests in math and reading that are administered as part of the North Carolina accountability system. The student data also include individual information about students, such as gender, disabilities race, and ethnicity. It covered students from school years 1999 through 2005 with standardize test scores within those grades and years. A study by Mac Iver and Epstein (1993) supported these findings by saying that departmentalizing at the junior high level also promotes higher achievement in science, social studies, and reading. Access to specialized instruction leads to higher accountability which in turn leads to higher test scores.

Impacts on Social and Emotional Aspects

In a departmentalized setting students rotate from class to class throughout the school day. Being able to move around more allows for students to appease their social needs which helps with their social growth and development (Harris 1996). In a study of fourth and fifth

grade departmentalization by Chan and colleagues (2009) explained that elementary students needed to be exposed to the opportunity to develop their survival skills as they transition from a self-centered childhood school setting to a group-centered way of school life. In addition, students seemed to like the freedom to move around from classroom to classroom. While departmentalization is not widely used at the elementary level, it can offer students the tools they need to successfully transition to middle level schools. The authors supported this idea by saying, “we feel that students today are overly protected by the greenhouse-type environments created by elementary educators” (Chan et al., 2009, p. 12). The self-contained classroom is the authors’ idea of a greenhouse-type environment because it is easily recognizable by most students and parents, making departmentalized classrooms less desired due to their unfamiliarity.

Liu (2011) described sixth graders transitioning into middle level schools, as afraid, and intimidated of the new school and new school structure. If they were introduced to this new school structure at the elementary level, it would be easier to transition into middle level schools when the time came. Kids would know what to expect during this transition, they could instead focus on time management and planning ahead for their next classes.

Impacts on Behavioral Aspects

The behavioral impacts from departmentalizing tend to be reactions to social emotional and academic issues. Research supports the belief that the fewer struggles a student has, the fewer behavior problems they will have. Teacher effectiveness is important for purposes other than high-stakes decisions (Goldhaber et al., 2013).

Minott (2016) elaborated on the fact that departmentalizing can give students’ multiple teachers they can go to for support in academics or life. Not all students and teachers are going to get along or even like one another, with students transitioning from classroom to classroom they

have the opportunity to make that connection with more than one teacher. Teachers note that challenging relationships are usually less difficult when students have the opportunity to move to another teacher for part of the day. Moving from class to class seemed to be a huge benefit to the more challenging student-teacher relationships. There was less teacher and student stress, which made for a better learning environment for everyone.

Negative Impacts of Departmentalization

Findings from a number of studies (see Chan et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2008; and Harris, 1996) suggest that achievement losses frequently result when transitioning from a self-contained setting to a departmentalized setting. Departmentalizing may have a negative effect on student teacher relationships due to the lack of closeness. The following sections detail what the literature says about how departmentalization negatively impacts elementary students. Academic success, social and emotional growth, and their behavior. Is the improvement of the learning process worth the risk?

Academic Impacts

There is an inevitable loss in academics when transitioning from a self-contained classroom to a departmentalized setting (Chan et al., 2009). Studies have been conducted with the goal of determining which is a better organizational structure for educating elementary age students. One study done in the public school system in Chicago by Harris in 1996, showed the impact of departmentalization on the reading achievement of sixth grade students (Harris, 1996). According to Harris (1996), most students in the experimental group only showed a few months of progress through an entire year. Some potential factors were, limited time on task, and poor

student teacher relationships. Indicating that instruction in a self-contained classroom is more effective for reading achievement of sixth grade students than departmentalized instruction.

In another study conducted by Alspaugh and Harting (1995), it was determined that in fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, there was a definite loss in reading achievement, the findings of this study showed that during the first year in a departmentalized setting after having been in a self-contained classroom students' reading scores dropped. The reading achievement scores seemed to go up during the second year and each year after that, however, the loss that took place during the transition year was never recovered. There is less flexibility in the departmentalized setting, each block is dedicated to a single topic, therefore teachers lack the freedom to spend more than the allotted time on a specific topic or pick back up on a topic that students may have struggled with, later in the day. It is also harder to make connections across the curriculum because the teacher is not in control of all content areas.

In another study, Hood (2008) explained both the pros and the cons of departmentalizing, “the danger of departmentalizing is the creation of silos, we have to teach (students) to be critical thinkers across subject areas” (Hood, 2008, p. 15). Markworth and colleagues (2016) discussed a key factor of creating silos, being time-on-task. Teachers in a departmentalized setting are often specialists in the content area they are teaching, however at the elementary level, teachers are not expected to be specialists in any specific area, they are generalists. They teach all content areas and are not necessarily better at one area than another. In a departmentalized setting, there is a limited amount of time for each class session, and students often cannot retain the necessary information when it is given in short block sections such as in the departmentalized setting. The lack of transition time in the self-contained setting allows for more class time, therefore more instructional time (McGrath and Rust, 2002). Markworth et al. (2016) explained, that as a

generalist, in a self-contained classroom, a teacher can weave together a lesson that incorporates reading, writing and math.

Teachers working in a self-contained classroom work with students in multiple areas, domains, and settings. Maslow explains that due to the time spent together, in a self-contained classroom, the teacher is aware of each student's educational strengths, and weaknesses, so they can establish and adjust learning goals for each student according to these needs (Marzano, 2003).

Multiple studies review the issue of whether the presences or absence of student-teacher relationships affect academic achievement. Harris (1996) argued that, social adjustments affect academic achievement. A teacher's understanding of students psychological and sociological needs is important for healthy social adjustment. Many would argue that departmentalizing is not developmentally appropriate for elementary aged students because young children need a stable and secure learning environment with the opportunity to develop a close personal relationship with their teacher (Harris, 1996).

Impacts on Social and Emotional Aspects

The transition from elementary to secondary schools comes at a challenging time in a student's life. They are experiencing changes in every aspect of their lives, intellectual, emotional, and social. Students are vulnerable; they need to be handled by adults who care and are willing to work together to plan lessons, monitor progress, and develop integrated programs and structure to increase student success (Bradley, 1988). Due to accountability pressures, schools may feel it is more important to departmentalize, this might not be the best way to improve school connectedness and its outcome - student success (Alspaugh & Harting, 1998).

For example, a study done by Chang et al. (2008) examined the relationship between different levels of departmentalization and students' connectedness to school in eight different elementary schools. The schools varied in level of departmentalization, including different grades and different content areas. The study showed that with increased departmentalization comes increased transition time therefore less time for building community amongst students, their peers, and their teachers. The literature also explained that students develop their skills in a social context, children become self-regulated learners through proximal interactions with adults. Similarly, Chan and colleagues (2009) argued that students who are part of a school environment that makes them feel safe and included, are more likely to be more engaged in class, think critically, and form opinions. When teaching in a departmentalized setting teachers and students may lose their closeness and class identity.

A study by Strohl et al. (2014) focused on three main areas: 1) examine departmentalized students vs. non-departmentalized students in their connectedness to school, 2) investigate the relationship between degrees of departmentalization and students' connectedness to school, and 3) explore whether departmentalization differentially related to students' connectedness to school by grade level. Strohl et al. (2014) determined that departmentalized classrooms lack connectedness, teachers do not get as much time with their students as they do in a self-contained classroom. Teachers get fewer of the weekend stories, family trip plans, and upcoming surprise holiday events, because there are too many students and not enough time.

Additionally, a study by Chang et al. (2008) evaluated students' thoughts and behaviors in both a self-contained setting and a departmentalized setting. The students in the self-contained classrooms described classroom supportiveness and trust/respect for teachers significantly high, while the students in a departmentalized classroom described it as much lower. The study

explained that creating a caring, supportive learning environment has been shown to increase adolescents' motivation to learn, encouraging students to work harder and stay in school. The study also showed that in a self-contained model, teachers feel more ownership towards their student's success. Blum (2005) explained that students perceived post-transition junior high school teachers to be less caring, warm, and supportive than pre-transition elementary teachers. Research supports that students are more likely to succeed academically when they believe their teachers care about them as individuals.

Those in favor of self-contained classrooms adhere to a whole-child approach, engaging students in developmentally appropriate methods by developing a close teacher–student relationship that includes the provision of emotional support (Eichhorn & Lacson, 2019). They contend that education at the elementary level should be child-centered rather than subject-centered (Harris, 1996). Teachers also have flexibility to make connections across subject areas, which promotes student engagement and makes content relevant (Eichhorn & Lacson, 2019).

A qualitative case study by Liu (2011) looked at the perception of 62 preservice teachers taking a mathematics methods course and all had pre-service teaching experience. The focus of the study was determining the teachers' perceptions of departmentalizing at the elementary level. A departmentalization model decreases the amount of contact time between students and teachers, which, in turn, decreases the likelihood that students feel attached to their teachers. Various aspects of a student's life affect their ability to learn. Being able to know students on a more personal level fosters the idea of a strong student teacher relationship, which leads to higher academic achievement. "Associated with the loss in student self-esteem in school transition is a change in student perception about school" (Alspaugh, & Harting, 1998, p. 38).

Impacts on Behavioral Aspects

Behaviors in students are often a reflection of their feelings. Harris explained in her 1996 study “The Effects of Departmentalization on the Reading Achievement of Sixth-Grade Students” that teacher student relations are significant to academic success. In the departmentalized setting, the teachers are responsible for educating three to four times as many students then in a self-contained setting, therefore making the students feel less connected to their teachers. The students also claimed to feel less competent because of the lack of time on task. moving around led to less structure which young kids need to make good decisions. Students in a departmentalized setting show more of a negative attitude towards school, reflect lower self-esteem, and are absent more often. Studies show that students need to have a good relationship with their teachers, encouraging excitement in learning to help them be successful (Liu, 2011).

A study by Chang and colleagues (2008) explained that teachers are less likely to create a relationship with families due to the number of students they are responsible for, and the lack of time spent getting to know the students. Teachers are not able to extend their work with a student beyond the regular instruction they are giving. There is decreased contact time between students and teachers. Students who feel closer to their teachers have less behavior problems and higher academic gains.

Chapter 3: Statement of Findings

Based on the research, it appears that departmentalizing is not an appropriate organizational structure to use on elementary age students. The review of the literature revealed contradicting outcomes when it comes to the effect of departmentalization on elementary student achievement, social emotional aspects, and behavioral aspects. Little comparative research has recently been done to identify the effects of self-contained and departmentalized classrooms on these three areas. Some earlier research was referenced in this literature review dating back to the 1960s through the 2000's (Ponder 2008). Various studies, including Goldhaber et al. (2012), Markworth et al. (2016), and Strohl et al. (2014), found a positive correlation between departmentalization and academic achievement at various levels. Other studies by Alspaugh and Harting (1998), Harris (1996), and Blum (2005) found that departmentalization did not result in significantly higher academic achievement, and could be directly related to the loss in student teacher relationships. The departmentalized structure decreases the amount of time a student has with an individual teacher, which in turn decreases the likelihood they will feel attached to or close to one another (Chang et al., 2008). The literature supports the idea that there are problems associated with transition from elementary school to an intermediate level school.

The literature used in this research, did not find a statistically significant difference among the levels of achievement associated with the different instructional formats but did indicate that the use of interdisciplinary team teaching has potential for improved student achievement during the transition year from elementary school to middle school and that it should be explored as a possible strategy (Alspaugh & Harting, 1998). A study by Liu (2011) explains team teaching, as two teachers working in the same grade combining to teach a self-

contained classroom. The teachers are responsible for teaching the content area they are most proficient in. This allows the best of both worlds. Students receive specialized instruction but are still able to create a close relationship with their teachers. Team teaching is a better option for students this age, it allows for the beginning steps into departmentalized setting but is only exposing the students to a couple of different teachers instead of seven to eight a day. The teachers are still specialists allowing the students to get the best instruction possible in each area (Bradley, 1988).

It can be concluded that teacher-student relations are highly significant to student achievement, and the self-contained classroom offers more opportunity for good teacher-student relations to develop. Any sort of educational improvement is dependent upon the attitudes of the adult population involved. Chang et al. (2008) and Meeuwisse et al. (2010) concluded that departmentalization had an adverse effect on student connectedness to school, which can result in lower attendance rates, and that student relationships with peers and with teachers are crucial contributors to academic success, encouraging a semi departmentalized setting. Semi departmentalizing is a mix of departmentalizing and self- contained classrooms. Students in a semi departmentalized school work with two to three teachers, giving them the opportunity to learn from teachers specialized in their area of instruction, while still getting that closeness that younger students really benefit from. The authors defend the idea of departmentalizing, but with limitations and guidelines to protect the needs of the students. What is important to keep in mind, is that the high stakes testing environment, such as departmentalization, needs to be examined not only in the context of achievement scores, but in the context of producing lifelong learners.

Conclusion

This review of the literature indicates a need for further research in the area of departmentalization in the elementary school setting. Elementary school years are the formative years, children develop their feelings towards school and learning during these years (Chang et al., 2008). In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987), he explains the lower-level needs as basic needs, and the higher-level needs as the intangible needs. The basic needs to be protected, and feel love and belonging are needs that are met by family, friends, peers, and even teachers. Students must have a good relationship with their teachers, encouraging excitement in learning (Liu, 2011). Elementary age students thrive on student teacher relationships (Maslow, 1987). Those who feel closer to their teachers have fewer behavior problems and show higher gains in academic skills than students who feel conflict with their teachers (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Silver et al., 2005). In times of frustration or stress, students must be able to reach out to their teachers. When a teacher has good rapport with their students, the child feels free to approach the teacher with concerns (Anderson, 2018). This behavior is typically seen in a self-contained setting, where the teacher focuses on the whole child (Brobst et al., 2016). Pre-adolescents need to feel secure, accepted, safe, connected, and validated. Transitioning from a self-contained classroom to a departmentalized setting during this stage of development can be a significant obstacle students face (Chan et al., 2009). On Maslow's pyramid, self-actualization is a higher level need that includes reaching your full potential. This can be demonstrated through educational success in disciplined student growth (Maslow, 1987). Students in self-contained classes had more positive attitudes toward school, reflected stronger self-esteem, and were absent significantly fewer days. There was a closeness to their teachers that their peers who were in a departmental program in junior high school did not have (Moore, 1984).

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