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Comparison of Self-Contained and Departmentalized Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Structure and Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

Most elementary schools adhere to a self-contained format to deliver student instruction. This case study explored the implementation of a nontraditional format typically used in middle and high schools known as departmentalized instruction. Twelve of 29 first through third grade teachers were asked by their administration to implement departmentalized instruction for a trial year. This study compares levels of perceived stress and morale in relation to job satisfaction between the departmentalized teachers and self-contained teachers within the same school. This case study utilized focus group interviews as well as data collected from pre- and post-surveys comprised of Likert-scaled items and open-ended questions. The survey responses informed the study about various dimensions of teacher morale and job satisfaction and the focus groups informed the study about departmentalized teachers' own comparison between the two models of instruction. Consistent with related literature, findings revealed departmentalized teachers experienced higher morale, lighter workload, and increased overall job satisfaction in comparison to self-contained teachers in the same school. Further, in comparison to their prior self-contained teaching experiences, departmentalized teachers overwhelmingly preferred the new structure.

Keywords: Departmentalize, Teacher job satisfaction, Teacher morale, Elementary teachers, Case study

1. Introduction

Over time, various factors have increased teachers' workloads, including policy changes, funding cuts, and increased levels of accountability. One major effect of increased workloads is burnout, or, "negative responses to the mismatch between job requirements and perceived abilities" (Brown, 2012, p. 48). Teacher burnout may ultimately lead to teachers leaving the field (Chang, 2009, p. 194), which can have a negative impact on student achievement (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frolich, & Tahan, 2011). Major themes found in literature regarding teacher burnout were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of inefficacy (Chang, 2009). Effectively minimizing the trend of highly qualified teachers leaving the field due to burnout could ultimately improve student achievement, as Aud et al.'s report (2011) cited teacher experience as a student achievement indicator. On the elementary level, veering from a traditional classroom format is one way schools may tackle this dilemma. Implementing departmentalization can decrease factors of burnout, such as workload and emotional exhaustion, as teachers prepare for and teach fewer subject areas (Chan & Jarman, 2004). Chan and Jarman (2004) highlighted the likelihood of retaining highly qualified teachers as a result of this transition in structure.

Departmentalization is a type of team teaching in which teachers teach as specialists in one or more content areas (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007). Typically in elementary school classrooms, classroom organizational structure follows a self-contained format, which operates under the assumption that "an elementary school teacher is a Jack (or Jill)-of-all-trades that is equally strong in all areas of the curriculum" (Chan & Jarman, 2004, p. 70). Because of the inherent format of the structure, teachers in departmentalized settings prepare for fewer subject areas than self-contained teachers, giving them more time to invest in preparation in each subject they teach. Some school districts are beginning to departmentalize at the elementary school level to meet the demands of accountability measures by giving students this specialized form of instruction from teachers (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007).

The residual effects of specialized instruction were shown to result in improvement in student achievement rates (Bailey, 2010; Hood, 2009; Piechura-Couture et al., 2006; Wilkins, 2008). Though some compromise might be necessary within a school to accommodate each teacher's subject preferences, departmentalization does provide the opportunity for teachers to specialize in their favored subjects and offers benefits for the teachers who may have to compromise. For instance, Lowery (2002) found specialized instruction built teachers' confidence and competence. Teaching fewer subjects improved subject-area attitudes by allowing teachers to focus on standards and teach strategies in depth rather than spreading their time and talents over a wide range of subject areas. Wilkins (2008) found that teachers with more positive attitudes toward specific subject areas used more effective instruction methods in those areas. While Lowery's (2002) study showed an improvement in attitudes and teaching abilities through specialized instruction, Wilkins (2008) showed teachers used more effective teaching methods in subject areas toward which they had more positive attitudes. Thus, these studies support the assertion that even if teachers are assigned to teach the subjects they least favor, research shows their attitudes toward those subjects could increase regardless.

If such a format could potentially increase teacher job satisfaction by reducing burnout and more importantly, positively impact student achievement, why are the majority of elementary school classrooms still self-contained (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Chang, 2008; Hood, 2009)? Although self-contained classrooms are the status quo for elementary schools, little research is available on the effectiveness of the structure, making the acquisition of stakeholder support difficult. Compared to changes in lunch schedules or time allotted for recess, a shift to departmentalization is a major change within an elementary school. Major changes require (a) sufficient time to be implemented, (b) commitment from stakeholders, (c) adequate resources, and (d) all involved to fully understand its purpose, implications, and implementation (Hope, 2002). With a constant stream of required policy from federal, state, and local levels, administrators may not welcome the idea of implementing another whole-school initiative like departmentalized teaching. One way to integrate such a change is by implementing through a pilot group of teachers before committing to a whole-school shift. Chan and Jarman (2004) suggested introducing departmentalization into the school by piloting the change with only the students whose parents request participation (p. 70). Piloting such a substantial change allows stakeholders to test its full-scale feasibility, identify potential problems, plan for logistical efficiency, and collect data to support the change (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

Only minimal research on the direct effects of departmentalization exists, and synthesized from that research, is an even more scant amount of evidence of its residual effects. Multiple researchers call for further studies on this topic, as most administrators do not view departmentalization as a viable option without supporting evidence (Delviscio & Muffs, 2007; McGrath, 2004). In an attempt to counter the problem of this sparse research base, this study thoroughly examined multiple aspects of one elementary school's experience with departmentalized instruction. This elementary school in rural Georgia implemented departmentalization through a pilot group of teachers for one year to determine its effects on them and their students. Besides predicting its feasibility for school-wide implementation, the central goal for piloting the format was to determine its impact on a portion of students and teachers before committing completely to the change. This study aimed to compare levels of morale between the departmentalized teachers and their non-departmentalized coworkers. It also explored their perceptions of job satisfaction as it related to instructional models.

2. Literature Review

High teacher turnover due to burnout can be reversed by decreasing teacher workload and increasing job satisfaction (Bridges & Searle, 2011; Timms, Graham, & Cottrell, 2007). In a typical elementary school with self-contained classrooms, these two monumental tasks could be tackled by implementing a system with significant direct and residual effects in those areas. Departmentalization is one option that would directly affect workload by decreasing the number of subjects taught by each teacher and indirectly affect job satisfaction by increasing efficacy; ultimately improving student achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Wilkins, 2010).

Chan and Jarman (2004) pointed out several qualities of departmentalization, such as the ways in which it helps students assimilate to middle school formats, creates grade-level

instructional teams, and promotes teacher retention. Teacher retention was shown to have significant positive impacts on student achievement (Barmby, 2006; Vanderhaar, Mu, & Rodosky, 2006). Vanderhaar et al. (2006) found teachers' average years of teaching, along with student poverty level and previous testing achievement, were the best indicators of student achievement. To keep teachers in the field longer and increase their average years of experience, school officials should advocate practices that prevent teacher burnout.

2.1 Teacher Workload

Bridges and Searle (2011) investigated teacher perceptions of workload. Based on their study, the authors found teachers' workloads significantly increased over the last 20 years, as well as hours per week worked; only about half of the respondents at the time of the study believed their current workload was sustainable. Through their qualitative study, Bridges and Searle (2011) revealed how workload affected teachers, potentially causing burnout or health issues. Departmentalized teachers plan for fewer subjects than self-contained teachers, decreasing the amount of time spent preparing and completing other non-teaching tasks, which was shown to decrease stress and increase job satisfaction (Perrachione, Rosser, & Peterson, 2008; Timms et al., 2007). This idea was explored by Perrachione et al. (2008) when they sought to identify the variables relating to teacher job satisfaction and retention. The authors discovered teachers who reported being more satisfied with their jobs were more likely to continue in their profession. Also, they revealed that teachers did not find satisfaction with work-related duties, which suggested teachers' satisfaction was associated with the "teaching" aspect of their jobs. Perrachione et al. (2008) concluded their findings suggest that reducing the obstacles to teaching "would increase teachers' job satisfaction, while amplification in obstacles and barriers would decrease teachers' satisfaction with their position" (p. 30). This reiterates that obstacles in teaching, such as paperwork requirements and the amount of planning and preparation required, can lead to job dissatisfaction, and potentially, teachers leaving the profession. Departmentalized teachers plan and prepare for fewer subjects, resulting in fewer obstacles and barriers and increasing job satisfaction.

As discussed, increasing workload, or maintaining a large workload are factors that have been shown to cause or increase stress in teachers. Timms et al. (2007) who investigated teachers' workload stated, "respondents found that workload constituted the major source of dissatisfaction with their work environment" (p. 577). Based on this study, the authors showed that teacher workload continued to increase for teachers, which amplified burnout factors like exhaustion and disengagement. These results highlight how teachers' immense workload can negatively affect their morale and stress levels, which can lead to burnout. Stress levels have been shown to affect teachers' ability to be affective, despite preparation. For instance, MacNeil, Prater, and Busch's (2009) study involving the impact of organizational health on student achievement revealed that high levels of stress were shown to negatively impact teachers' ability to be responsive and effective. Further, their study revealed the most influential factor found to impact organizational health was adaptation, which according to the instrument used, is the ability to tolerate stress and maintain stability while being responsive to the demands of the external environment. The structure of departmentalization alleviates a portion of teachers' workload, which may positively affect

stress levels, allowing teachers to more effectively meet the needs of their students. Another study that considered teacher effectiveness in relation to stress was performed by Fantuzzo, Perlman, Sproul, Minney, Perry, and Li (2012). They studied teacher experiences and discovered that teachers with higher levels of stress spent less time teaching than those with less stress. To support their argument, they reported, "teachers experiencing higher levels of stress spent less time teaching literacy and numeracy and interacting with parents, whereas teachers experiencing higher levels of efficacy spent increased time teaching both cognitive skills and social-emotional skills and communicating with parents" (p. 194).

2.2 Stress Levels

Teacher workload indirectly influences student achievement by triggering stress, which ultimately affects teacher impact (Klassen, 2010; MacNeil et al., 2009; Timms et al., 2007). Other factors have been shown through various studies to negatively impact teachers by increasing stress levels also; however, the format of departmentalized instruction alleviates many stressors experienced by most traditional self-contained teachers. For example, Sass, Seal, and Martin (2011) conducted a study to determine impacts of stress levels on teacher retention rates and found student behavior had a significant impact on teachers' stress levels. In most cases, teachers are not given choices in regards to the types of students they will teach; leading to classrooms with a hodgepodge of personalities, learning styles, and behavior-related issues (Klassen, 2010). Essentially, in departmentalized settings, teachers experience only a portion of each day with a class of students, resulting in less stress caused by any problematic students. A class of students is with a teacher for only half of a school day or less, and then they transition to another classroom with another teacher. Because departmentalized elementary teachers do not stay with the same students like in the traditional self-contained organizational structure; they get to start fresh with a new group about halfway through the school day.

Another stressor endured by teachers is the expectation to communicate effectively with parents (Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2007). Two common parent-related issues teachers face is lack of involvement and lack of cooperation (Prakke & van Peet, 2007). Departmentalized settings are comprised of two or more teachers, allowing parental feedback from more than one teacher's perspective. This may be especially beneficial when dealing with defensive parents because each of the students' teachers can provide observations of student behavior from more than one setting. When dealing with uncooperative parents, this setting may also be beneficial for seeking increased parental involvement, as the same parents may be contacted by multiple teachers who teach their students, instead of a single teacher making multiple contacts.

2.3 Opposition

With conflicting student achievement studies and a small pool of research from which to defend or oppose departmentalized instruction in elementary schools, individual components of the classroom structure are used to create arguments for either side. One of these components is the focus of instructional delivery; self-contained structures align with student-centered ideals while departmentalization aligns with a subject-centered approach.

Oppositional arguments are based on the idea of teaching the whole child.

The idea of teaching the whole child aligns closely with the learner-centered ideology in which the scope of instruction goes beyond academic curriculum and extends to address social and emotional needs of students (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2011; Schiro, 2008). Advocates of this ideology propose the role of the instructor is to individualize instruction for students based on their "strengths, weaknesses, and personality traits" (Elkind, 1988, p. 13). Elkind (1988) stressed the importance of the student-teacher connection, especially for younger elementary students, by positing rotation (or departmentalizing) disrupts younger students' learning and increases their stress levels and learning problems (p. 13). Chang and Muñoz's (2008) argument presented decades later was similar to that of Elkind's. They supported the idea of solid student-teacher relationships by arguing that generalists, or self-contained teachers, teach their students across all areas, allowing them to know the students' strengths and weaknesses across various settings, to meet their needs. One study conducted by Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts, and Morrison (2008) examined the amount of student-teacher interaction at the elementary level and supported Elikind's (1988) and Chang and Muñoz's (2008) argument. They examined the extent to which variation in the quality of emotional and instructional interactions predicted trajectories of achievement in reading and math from 54 months to fifth grade. The authors found positive correlations in both math and reading for quality of teaching and social/emotional interaction. This evidence may reveal a link between emotional needs of children and academic achievement. Culyer (1984) stressed the importance of the individualization of education based on the needs of each student, noting the importance of the self-contained classroom structure in facilitating such instruction.

For elementary-age students, the social and emotional aspects of whole child instruction are fostered through relationships with their teachers, as studied by Pianta and Stuhlman (2004). Through their study, they revealed the quality of the relationship between young students and their teachers significantly impacted their behavioral and academic trajectories. Students' relationship with their teachers also affected their sense of connection to their school (Chang & Muñoz, 2008). In their study, Chang and Muñoz (2008) found that students in self-contained models rated trust and respect for teachers as well as classroom supportiveness significantly higher than students in departmentalized models. They found departmentalized instruction had an even greater negative impact on younger students and students with three or more teachers.

When elementary teachers departmentalize, they are responsible for more students than self-contained teachers. This distribution releases each teacher from complete accountability of any individual student, as they share this responsibility with students' other teachers. Another concern about departmentalization revealed in the literature is the potential for teachers to lose a sense of personal responsibility toward student success (Chang & Muñoz, 2008, p. 133). Teachers may lose a sense of ownership toward individual student success when they share teaching responsibility with other teachers for the same students (Chang & Muñoz, 2008). An additional diffused responsibility related to the departmentalized structure is parental contact, as studied by Epstein and Dauber (1991). They found that teachers of

self-contained classrooms had significantly higher parental involvement than departmentalized teachers. Self-contained teachers were more familiar with students as a result of more daily student-teacher interactions and were more likely to make contact with parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Remaining with the same academic teacher throughout the course of the day, as advocated by Culyer (1984), poses other advantages, such as flexibility with scheduling (McGrath & Rust, 2002). Teachers who maintain one group of students a day within the same room have the option to adjust their instructional schedule according to the needs of the students, whereas departmentalized schedules are more rigid because of the class rotation schedule. Worthy of mention, Elkind (1984) postulated that a significant amount of time was lost during students' class transition; however, McGrath and Rust, who also opposed departmentalization, conducted a study that revealed no significant differences between the teaching models regarding actual instructional time (2002).

2.4 Summary

With little evidence to support or negate direct effects of departmentalized instruction on student achievement, opposition to departmentalized instruction in elementary schools rests mostly on the concept of student-centered instruction, which goes beyond academic objectives to include social and emotional needs of the students (Schiro, 2008). Another argument for self-contained instruction is its impact on students' feelings toward school. Students in self-contained structures were shown to have an increased feeling of connectedness to their school (Chang & Muñoz, 2008), which also supports the idea of student-centered instruction. Another negative point held by those opposed to departmentalized instruction is a decline in the sense of ownership teachers have toward their students (Chang & Muñoz, 2008; Epstein & Dauber, 1991), which can be attributed to the increased number of teachers per child. Conflicts related to time and scheduling were also found to be common themes in literature opposing departmentalized instruction (Elkind, 1988; McGrath & Rust, 2002).

Teacher attrition has been shown to increase student achievement, and departmentalized instruction affects areas that may decrease burnout caused by workload, which ultimately has an influence on teachers leaving the field. By decreasing the amount of subjects taught in a day, teachers' workloads are reduced, decreasing levels of stress which lead to burnout. With fewer subjects to teach, the focused planning, preparation, and professional development improves teachers' instruction methods and content knowledge, giving them higher levels of confidence in their abilities (self-efficacy). Advocates of departmentalized instruction argue the residual effects of this structure have positive impacts on teachers, which ultimately improve instructional quality for students.

3. Methodology

According to Patton (2002), "Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry" (p. 14). This qualitative

case study explored differences in perceptions between departmentalized and self-contained teachers within the same school.

3.1Participants and Research Site

The 29 Participants in this study were first, second, and third grade teachers in a Title 1 elementary school in a rural Georgia area serving around 800 students. Administrators chose 12 teachers, four for each grade level, to teach in the departmentalized structure for one year while the remaining 17 teachers taught in the traditional self-contained setting. These 12 teachers, who taught in self-contained settings the year prior to the trial, were selected as participants for this research due to their involvement in the year-long trial of departmentalized instruction.

3.2 Procedures

The data presented in this study were taken partially from a survey administered both before and after the year departmentalized instruction was implemented to compare its impact on certain aspects of teacher morale and perceptions of work environment. Along with this survey completed by all 29 teachers, data were also gathered from focus groups and individual interviews with the 12 departmentalized teachers. A university research expert was consulted before administering the survey and revisions were made based on his advice. Prior to dispersing the survey, three teachers were asked to review its structure and report any misunderstandings, unclear instructions or statements, and estimate time necessary for completion. Based on their reviews, the survey items were clear and needed no further revisions. They estimated the survey to take 15 to 30 minutes, depending on participants' depth of responses to open-ended items.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved the use of surveys and focus groups. The two-part survey contained ten questions from the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire (Bentley & Rempel, 1980) to gather data from all teachers prior to and following implementation of the departmentalized structure. To encourage candid responses, teachers were asked to exclude identifiable information in their responses, including their names and specific situations such as pregnancies or marriages. Teachers were also given the option to complete the survey electronically if they had concerns of penmanship recognition. A large envelope was placed in a designated area for teachers to return their surveys and they were asked to place checks beside their names on a list as they returned them to ensure all surveys were returned. To compare data, surveys completed by departmentalized teachers were marked on the first page of each. The first part of the survey consisted of ten Likert-scaled items to provide an overview of perceptions regarding factors of teacher morale. These items mostly focused on the concepts of teacher rapport with the principal, satisfaction with teaching, and teacher workload (Bentley & Rempel, 1980). Teachers were asked to rate the ten statements using a four-point scale that measured the degree of agreement: (1) *Strongly Disagree*, (2) *Disagree*, (3) *Agree,* and (4) *Strongly Agree*. The results of this study that are reported here are largely based on the focus group and open-ended components of the survey, but the Likert-scaled items did provide a

general numerical comparison of changes in perceptions of the two groups. The validity and reliability of the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire, from which the ten Likert-scaled items were chosen, were tested by Bentley and Rempel (1980) for validity and reliability. For the categories from which the ten items on the survey this study were chosen, they reported the test-retest correlations were greater than .75. Open-ended questions followed the Likert-scaled components on the survey. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to gather more candid data by allowing teachers to respond anonymously using their own words. Responses were coded like the focus group transcriptions, which built a foundation for interpretation as meanings were extracted from data, comparisons were made, and conclusions were drawn (Patton, 2002, p. 465). For comparison, the same survey was given at the end of the year before departmentalization began and again at the end of the year it was implemented.

Focus groups were also used in this study to collect data. Departmentalized teachers were asked to participate in two to three focus group sessions, consisting of four to six participants, to discuss their perceptions involving their work experiences. Focus group participants were asked to stay for the duration of one hour, but were not interrupted if they wished to continue the discussion beyond the allotted time. Focus groups were used to elaborate on themes found from coded departmentalized teacher surveys. Major themes found in the pre-surveys included workload, morale levels, and overall job satisfaction. The discussions of each meeting were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for additional themes. Data from the open-ended component of the departmentalized teachers' surveys were categorized with data from the transcriptions. Respondent validation, a systematic process of checking with respondents to ensure their responses and views are relayed clearly by the researcher (Maxwell, 2006), was implemented in this study. Following each meeting, participants were given summaries highlighting major themes and viewpoints along with copies of transcriptions and were asked to clarify misconceptions of statements, and/or further elaborate on topics after reading the summaries.

The coding process was guided by Saldaña's (2009) dual-cycle system in which data coding is approached in *cycles*, which does not necessarily correlate to number of times the data is read. Cycles refer to the lens through which the researcher views the data; and allows researchers to analyze large amounts of data in steps, with one cycle laying the foundation for another (p. 72). First Cycle coding involves processes that occur during the initial coding of data and are divided into subcategories that include, among others, Grammatical, Elemental, Procedural, and Exploratory (p. 45). One Grammatical First Cycle coding method used in this study was Simultaneous Coding, in which two or more codes were used for a single qualitative datum (p. 62). For instance, *workload* and *lesson planning* were often used simultaneously when coding specific comments made by teachers in the study. These First Cycle methods provided the foundation from which to begin Second Cycle methods, in which such analytical skills as "classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building" were used (p. 45).

Second Cycle methods, as described by Saldaña (2009), "are advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods." (p. 149). Saldaña also cited other

researchers' coding methods in his coding handbook when he elaborated on cycles of analysis. For instance, he discussed Miles and Huberman's (1994) Pattern Coding, which was a Second Cycle method used in this study. Pattern codes were used to assist in pulling together "a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis.... Pattern Coding is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs." (p. 69). This particular method was used to develop major themes in this study, including self-efficacy and collective efficacy. The transcriptions, questionnaire and survey compilations, teacher journals, and graphic organizers were all coded for patterns and entered into comparison tables in a word processor. This method allowed the researcher to more efficiently manipulate and locate portions of data for comparison.

Finally, in Second Cycle coding, Longitudinal Coding was implemented later in the study (Saldaña, 2009). Longitudinal Coding allowed the researcher to compare observations and changes over time through the use of matrices (p. 173). These matrices streamlined the major concepts and allowed for "comparative analysis and interpretation to generate inferences of change" (p. 173). As suggested by Saldaña, Longitudinal Coding was used to analyze participants over time, from implementation of departmentalized instruction to the year following the removal of it.

4. Results

Consistent with related literature, findings in this study revealed departmentalized teachers experienced higher morale, lighter workload, and increased overall job satisfaction in comparison to self-contained teachers in the same school. Departmentalized teachers in this study also overwhelmingly preferred teaching in the new structure than to teaching in the traditional self-contained structure. Teachers in the self-contained setting in the same school indicated interest in participating in departmentalized teaching if given the opportunity. Through surveys containing both Likert-scaled items as well as open-ended items, data showed changes in departmentalized teachers' perceptions of the workplace that were explored further through focus groups.

4.1 Likert-scaled Items

Table 1 shows results of Likert-scaled items for both departmentalized teachers and self-contained teachers. Results for the surveys given prior to and after the year departmentalized instruction was implemented are shown with changes in results between the two. Because the Likert-scaled items were used to provide a general overview of opinion, *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* responses were combined and *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree* answers were combined.

Likert-scaled items revealed departmentalized teachers felt their workloads decreased more than self-contained teachers over the year. When compared to the survey results of pre-departmentalized teaching, post-departmentalized results showed 59% fewer departmentalized teachers reported that their workload restricted outside activities while there was no change in how self-contained teachers reported. Additionally, compared to their overall responses from the pre-survey, the post-survey revealed fewer departmentalized

teachers agreed the amount of hours required were too high (58% decrease). The departmentalized format seemed to positively affect self-efficacy as well, as a higher percentage (33% increase) of departmentalized teachers felt successful and competent after teaching in this format as compared to before. Also the post-survey revealed that feelings of stress that made teaching undesirable increased for self-contained teachers by 12% while they decreased for the departmentalized teachers by 25%.

Table 1. Results for Likert-Scaled Items

	Pre-survey		Post-survey			
Likert-scaled Item (N = 29)	Dept. % Agree	Self-cont. % Agree	Dept. % Agree	Self-cont. % Agree	Dept. % Change	Self-cont. % Change
1. Required paperwork took up too much of my time.	100	100	75	100	-25	0
2. Teachers in this school are required to do an unreasonable amount of clerical work and record keeping.	92	88	83	100	-9	12
3. My teaching load restricts my nonprofessional activities and responsibilities outside of school.	92	94	33	94	-59	0
4. My teaching load and responsibilities are greater than most of the other teachers in the school.	42	35	8	35	-34	0
5. The number of hours a teacher is required to work is too high.	100	82	42	94	-58	6
6. My school supplies with me the materials I need to complete my duties.	67	50	58	24	-9	-26
7. There is a great deal of complaining about teaching responsibilities in our school.	92	88	75	94	-17	6
8. Teachers at our school cooperate with one another to reach common professional objectives.	92	88	100	94	8	6
9. I feel successful and competent in my present profession.	50	82	83	71	33	-11
10. The “stress and strain” resulting from teaching makes teaching undesirable to me.	75	76	50	88	-25	12

4.2 Open-ended Items

Open-ended items on the surveys were coded for themes and used to form discussion topics for focus groups. The pre-survey responses revealed the following themes concerning work environment: *implementation of math requirements, overall workload, job dissatisfaction,* and *lack of morale.* These themes were discussed by the departmentalized teachers in the focus groups and they provided perspectives on the impacts of departmentalization on those specific topics. The emergence of math implementation as a theme was a result of a new math program teachers in the school were required to implement, in both departmentalized and self-contained classrooms. For the pre-survey, departmentalized teachers' and self-contained teachers' responses for the open-ended items revealed the same themes; however, the post-survey revealed vast differences between the two groups. The following are summaries of the open-ended items with sample responses representing the themes found for each item.

4.2.1. Stress Level for Previous Year

Given at the end of two consecutive school years, teachers were asked to respond to all survey items based on the year that was ending. For the first item, teachers were asked to describe their stress levels for that year, compare their levels of stress to their past three years of teaching, and to elaborate if they believed their stress had increased within the last three years. The post-survey revealed a vast difference in reported stress levels for departmentalized teachers and self-contained teachers. While almost all teachers reported having much higher stress levels for the year on the pre-survey, the post-survey results showed all departmentalized teachers had decreased levels of stress, and self-contained teachers' stress levels increased or remained as high as the previous year.

A departmentalized teacher reported, "My stress level for this past year was greatly reduced as I was part of team teaching this year. I still had 'normal' stress, but not as unbearable as in previous years." Another wrote, "My stress for this year was very low, and my stomach problems are gone and migraines have been completely manageable." Noting the initial stress of adjusting to the change, one teacher responded, "At the beginning of the year, my stress level was high, but throughout the year, it got so much better only having to teach three subject areas."

Contrary to departmentalized teachers, self-contained teachers in the same school reported increased or high levels of stress. One self-contained teacher reported, "I decided to retire. I really wanted to teach two or more years, but I felt totally overwhelmed and did not want to do this anymore." Another said, "At times, the stress level was very high. There were many times our days were taken up with meetings, so after school was the only time to get work done, and often, meetings filled that time also."

4.2.2 Factors Contributing to Stress

For the next two items on the survey, participants were asked to list items they believed contributed to their stress levels and then rank them from most stressful to least stressful. For both pre- and post-surveys, "unnecessary paperwork" was the most reported stressor and highest ranked overall for both self-contained and departmentalized teachers.

Departmentalized teachers reported fewer curriculum factors contributing to their stress than self-contained teachers. Overarching curriculum factors, such as the pacing timeline set by system-level leaders and unrealistic expectations in regards to implementing curriculum were listed by departmentalized teachers, while content-specific factors were prevalent in self-contained teachers' responses. Over half of the self-contained stress factor responses included implementing specific components of math or language arts, such as "math fact fluency testing" and "collecting and grading multiple writing samples." For these responses, several departmentalized teachers noted having difficulty adding to the list because their stressed had decreased from the previous year.

4.2.3 Participant suggestions and additional comments

Teachers were also asked to provide suggestions for reducing stress factors in the work environment. Almost every departmentalized teacher advocated departmentalized teaching as a way to reduce stress. Additionally, many self-contained teachers also suggested implementing departmentalized teaching, though they had not experienced teaching in that way. Many additional comments were offered from departmentalized teachers encouraging decision-makers to seriously consider implementing the structure school wide. One departmentalized teacher said:

> I felt so much happier this year with team teaching. My friends and family could really see a difference. All the teachers I have talked to about team teaching want us to at least try it…This option may not be the right choice for [our] county, but if happier, less-stressed, and more efficient teaching is what our system wants, need to really consider team teaching.

Another shared, "Teachers who were departmentalized did not have to stay for hours after work and on weekends to prepare lessons and complete paperwork. They had a better morale overall as compared to their peers." Self-contained teachers' additional comments were related to unmanageable workload, high stress levels, and low morale. One self-contained teacher wrote, "I teach because I love it and the kids. The paperwork and expectations have caused me to dislike my job and consider other options."

4.3 Focus Groups

Focus group sessions were used to gain departmentalized teachers' perspectives on the impact of departmentalization on major themes found in the pre-survey, including workload, levels of morale, and overall job satisfaction. Teachers in departmentalized settings unanimously reported a decrease in workload, as one stated:

> It's not necessarily less work; it's more focused, so we don't feel so 'spread out' over multiple things. We actually feel like we are doing a few things well and completely, instead of doing countless tasks halfway. Given the same amount of time as when I was self-contained, I am not as stressed because I go home feeling accomplished instead of dreading all the half-way completed tasks I have left to do the next day.

Other teachers added other benefits of the structure in decreasing workload, like grading

double the amount of the same assessment (for two classes of students), versus grading various assessments for one class of students. They discussed the efficiency of grading more of the same test, as one teacher said, “The answers become more familiar as you see more of the same document, and the grading becomes faster as the answers are memorized. Also I am not wasting time stopping and starting over again to grade a different test.” Planning for three subjects instead of six was also attributed to the sense of a lighter workload. Though teachers still felt they worked hard, they felt more accomplished as they were able to supplement their three subjects with more teaching resources.

Morale was also a topic discussed frequently in focus groups. Many discussed feeling more positive and enthusiastic about their teaching because they were more prepared for their lessons. All departmentalized teachers noted they were more focused and involved with their students due to more concentrated workloads and planning. Overall job satisfaction was improved for the departmentalized teachers, as they all agreed they enjoyed their teaching experience more than the other years they taught in the self-contained structure. A few teachers explained their jobs were no longer affecting their personal lives as well. One stated:

> My job was interfering with my personal time, which includes time I spend with my family. Having so much on my plate before would stress me out and I would be in a bad mood when I got home. My family did not deserve the exhausted, grumpy teacher this job was turning me into. They have all noticed a difference this year, and I notice not having negative feelings toward work anymore because of that.

5. Conclusion

Since little research exists on departmentalized instruction on the elementary level, administrators do not readily accept the idea of departmentalized instruction on the elementary level (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Hood, 2009). Piloting such a structure, like the school in this study, gives administrators a preview of potential problems and successes (Chan & Jarman, 2004) and allows them to make educated decisions based on data and teacher feedback. This study adds to the limited scope of literature regarding elementary departmentalized teaching. An additional purpose for this study was to determine the impact of this structure on a school with overall low morale, as shown by the pre-survey. A survey with Likert-scaled items and open-ended questions, as well as focus groups provided data about perceptions of self-contained and departmentalized teachers for comparison. Reflecting findings in the literature, as workloads of departmentalized teachers decreased, stress levels also decreased, resulting in higher morale and job satisfaction.

As more pressure is placed on educational systems, teachers’ workloads are steadily increasing (Bridges & Searle, 2011). To decrease burnout and job dissatisfaction, administrators should make efforts to alleviate stressful components of teacher responsibilities. Much like Perrachione, Rosser, and Peterson (2008) found, this study revealed teachers can become overwhelmed with tasks, increasing their stress levels and leaving them with a sense of inadequacy. Departmentalized teachers in this study reported an increase in morale, as they felt more confident in their abilities because they were able to complete tasks with more focus on fewer subject areas. For some departmentalized teachers,

relieving stress also improved their personal health, well-being, and family relationships. They reported an increase in job satisfaction as they were not attributing the negative effects of stress to their job and work environment.

As students' affective needs create the focal point of the opposing argument against departmentalized instruction, more research should be conducted on how students' needs could be addressed through departmentalized instruction. Further, departmentalization may be more or less beneficial to certain groups of students based on learning styles and levels of adaptability; therefore, research revealing effects of this learning structure on various types of students would also be valuable.

The findings in this study show the advantage of piloting major changes in schools before implementing school-wide. Collecting data before and after implementation allows decision-makers to compare attributes of two or more formats and make educated decisions that are supported through analysis. Also, allowing participants of a pilot group to provide perspectives and experiences through an anonymous medium may also encourage more candid responses. Teachers in this study were more descriptive and bold in their anonymous open-ended questions than in focus group sessions with their peers. This study can be utilized by administrators and other decision makers to see the impact of departmentalized instruction on a large elementary school. Though the study utilized 29 participants, they worked in the same school under the same conditions, limiting other factors that may have influenced responses. Other teachers may also benefit from the results of this study as they can become more informed on a system they might suggest to their administrators.

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