

The organizational structures of the elementary classroom



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The review of literature is organized into five areas. The first area explores the theoretical/conceptual framework of the organizational structures of the elementary classroom. The traditional, self-contained, classroom along with the different types of departmentalized instructional arrangements. The second area, student achievement findings in different types of organizational structures are highlighted in a chronological manner. The third and fourth areas look into reading and mathematics achievement at the elementary school level. Finally, the fifth area summarizes the review of literature findings.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Throughout much of the 20th century, elementary school structure has been debated by educators and administrators (McGrath & Rust, 2002) in relationship to both student learning (improving both reading and math) and teacher efficiency. From the early 1900s to 1930 there was a growing interest in departmentalization, and during these years it was on the increase; from 1930 to 1940 there was constant debate between those who favored the self-contained classroom and those who favored the departmentalization structure, with each side claiming advantages to each; between 1940 and 1949 more schools and districts were reported as giving up on the departmentalization aspect than adopting it; then in the decade from 1950 to 1959, departmentalization was increasing again, mostly in the intermediate grades and junior high schools (Lobdell & Van Ness, 1963). Throughout the remainder of the 20th century there was still a lot of debate but a majority of the self-contained classrooms were used in the elementary schools and the departmentalized approach was being used in the junior

high and high schools. Today, there is some departmentalization happening in the primary grades, but not a great deal.

Traditional Classroom Structure. The self-contained classroom is the most common elementary school organization used today; Ackerlund (1959) felt that although self-contained maintains a better student-teacher relationship, it is difficult for the teacher to be knowledgeable and prepared to teach all subjects.

Departmentalized Classroom Structure. Across the United States departmentalization has been implemented in a variety of ways. The American Association of School Administrators (1965) reported on a nationwide survey that was conducted by the Educational Research Service. The purpose of the survey was to discover how many schools were implementing departmentalization, what variation of departmentalization they used, and allowed the responding schools to explain any advantages and disadvantages about departmentalization pertaining to students, teachers, and parents. The results confirmed that there were many elementary schools that used a variation of departmentalization. This survey concluded that many schools throughout the United States have tried departmentalization, and some schools continued to use it due to its success. The results of the survey concluded that departmentalization can be successful for students and teachers when implemented to fit the needs of the school.

Student Achievement Findings

In the past, a limited number of empirical studies and research reports have attempted to determine the relationship between classroom organizational structures and student achievement. Specifically, the literature has attempted to address whether or not a relationship exists between two prominent types of classroom organizations (i. e., self-contained classrooms and departmentalized classrooms) and student achievement (reading and math) within those structures.

Harris's (1996) study was on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms affect on sixth grade students reading achievement. In this study 107 Chicago students were sampled in two groups. One group consisted of students learning reading in a departmentalized classroom structure and another group in a self-contained classroom structure. The reading comprehension was measured by the Basic Skills IOWA test. The results were that self-contained students scored higher than departmentalized students significantly. Harris believed that this may be only because sixth grade students may be too immature to adjust to the new routine and do not need constant change.

The following theory about departmentalization was studied by McGrath and Rust (2002), when a school is departmentalized there will be both a decrease in academic achievement and a loss of instructional minutes, due to transitions between classes. The subjects of the study were 197 fifth and sixth grade students from a rural school district in Tennessee. All students attended self-contained classes until fourth grade. School A was

departmentalized in fifth and sixth grade and School B was departmentalized
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in sixth grade. Academic achievement was measured using the norm referenced Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). The data for transition time was by direct observation in the classrooms for two full days. The study revealed that self-contained students performed better in language and science for both fifth and sixth grades. There was very little difference found in reading, math, and social studies. Test results showed that all groups had shown improvement from the previous assessment. The data for transition time determined that transitions were more efficient in self-contained classes, but instructional minutes per class were not significantly different. The author felt that self-contained classes performed higher academically.

Reading Achievement

Reading achievement in the state of Florida has been steadily increasing over the last decade. According to the 2007 National Assessment of Education Programs (NAEP) report the number of fourth graders who score at or above the proficient level raised from 21% in 1992 to 34% in 2007. Eight grade students in the state have shown an increase from 23% of the students reaching at the proficiency level in 1992 to 28% in 2007. As part of the student assessment and school accountability programs of the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), FCAT assessments are designed to measure student achievement in specific reading content, as described by the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) (FDOE, 1996).

Literacy is defined as “ the ability to read and write information to function in society.” Being literate is critical for life-long success in almost all endeavors.

There is concern in our country about the reading achievement levels of <https://assignbuster.com/the-organizational-structures-of-the-elementary-classroom/>

students of all ages and grade levels. Millions of students attend public schools in hopes of receiving a quality education; however, for many students this dream will never become a reality. In today's schools, too many children struggle with learning to read. As many teachers and parents will confirm, reading failure has exacted a huge long-term consequence for children's self-confidence to learn to read (NRP 2002).

Mathematics Achievement

Mathematics achievement in the state of Florida has also been steadily increasing over the last decade. According to the 2009 National Assessment of Education Programs (NAEP) report the number of fourth graders who score at or above the proficient level raised from 52% in 1992 to 86% in 2009. Eight grade students in the state have shown an increase from 49% of the students reaching at the proficiency level in 1992 to 70% in 2009. As stated before, FCAT assessments are also designed to measure student achievement in specific math content, as described by the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) (FDOE, 1996).

Summary

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