

Principals' Perceptions of Departmentalization and Self-Contained
Classrooms at the Elementary School Level

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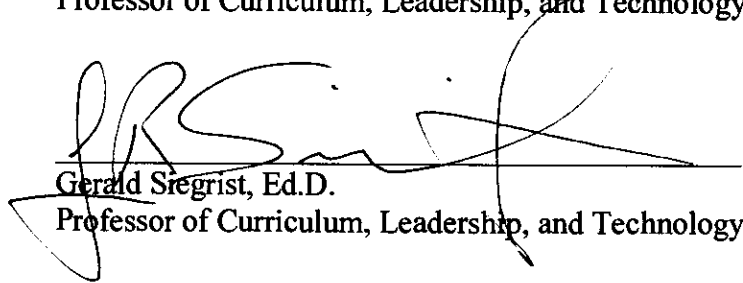


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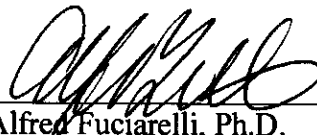
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ABSTRACT

Principals of elementary schools have the challenge of meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of the students in their building. The passing of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) increased the federal government's involvement in education, which resulted in the requirement of student subpopulations achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP). The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. The conceptual frameworks of Maslow's (1943, 1971) Theory of Human Motivation and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies supported and informed the study's focus on organizational structures.

A purposeful sampling technique provided six information-rich cases along a continuum of organizational structure preferences, from departmentalized to self-contained classrooms. Interviews with six principals and document analysis of the master schedules from each of their schools provided data related to the decisions principals made regarding organizational structures at the elementary school level. The constant comparative method for qualitative data analysis informed the development of study findings from collected data.

The data from this study resulted in six major themes principals may consider before making a decision on organizational structure at the elementary level. These findings included *what works, transitions, it's all about the people, relationships are the foundation, success with data, and stakeholders' perceptions matter*. An analysis of the findings included how these themes fit within current literature on the topic, provided limitations of the study, and discussed implications for future research and practice.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my beautiful wife, Alicia, and to our precious daughters, Ava and Addyson. We truly work as a family to achieve our goals and dreams. I achieved this personal and professional goal of completing a dissertation with the support of my wonderful family. Thank you for helping me meet my deadlines, for giving me a hug when you walked through the room, and for smiling at me when you knew I needed uplifting. Your support and encouragement helped me realize this goal, and now I am dedicated to helping you fulfill your dreams. Lastly, I want to thank my mom, Elaine Rogers, who was not able to physically see me accomplish this goal, but who instilled in me a life-long desire to dream big, work hard, and achieve my goals. I will forever love and treasure Alicia, Ava, Addyson, and my mom.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), Public Law 107-110, increased the federal government's involvement in education by mandating annual assessments of student achievement through standardized testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The NCLB set out to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child was left behind. The purpose of this bill was to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This bill requires each school and the various student subpopulations (African American, economically disadvantaged, students with disability, etc.) within the school, to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with separate measurable annual objectives and to publish the results by school. AYP requires high academic standards, defined as most or all students meeting or exceeding the state standards. The states must design and administer statistically valid and reliable annual assessments each spring to grades three through eight in the subject areas of reading and math (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The NCLB Act stresses continuous and substantial academic improvement of all students and has "extended the reach of federal statutes in education like never before in the nation's history" (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010, p. 8). If a school does not meet AYP for

each student subgroup, the federal government places the school on the “Needs Improvement” list, and the school may face subsequent sanctions.

During the 2009-2010 school year in the State of Georgia, 1,718 of 2,221 schools (77.4%) met AYP (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). In 2012, Georgia received a waiver from the federal government on the need for all students to pass the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) by the 2013-2014 school year under NCLB. The federal government will now assess Georgia schools with the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), which examines a number of indicators to determine if a school meets AYP (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Student subpopulations are just one of the factors assessed under the CCRPI. Other indicators include the percent of students meeting and exceeding CRCT standards, percent of students meeting and exceeding expectations on the fifth grade writing assessment, and the percent of students completing ten Career Awareness Lessons by the end of the fifth grade. Due to the emphasis on accountability, administrators at all academic levels must consider a number of operational and logistical issues to increase the likelihood of the school attaining the CCRPI indicators. These operational and logistical issues affect student achievement and the likelihood of a school being successful based on the CCRPI indicators. The organizational structure, departmentalization or self-contained classrooms, of an elementary school is one operational issue elementary principals face on a yearly basis that affects student achievement (Williams, 2009).

Organizational structures are the types of structures used in schools, which influence the instructional delivery of core content (Williams, 2009). The types of organizational structures most frequently researched include (1) the self-contained

classroom, where students have the same teacher for all academic areas including language arts, math, science, and social studies; and (2) the departmentalized classroom, where students have more than one teacher for different academic areas and rotate between two or more teachers for a set period of time (Williams, 2009).

Elementary schools across the nation presently use many different organizational structures (Becker, 1987; Parker, 2005; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011). In self-contained classrooms, students spend all day in one classroom receiving their math, language arts, science, and social studies instruction from one teacher (Dropsey, 2004); however, the students typically leave the classroom for their art, music, and physical education classes. In contrast, departmentalization is a four-teacher model where a different teacher teaches each major academic subject area resulting in the students switching classes four times (Dropsey, 2004). Departmentalization may also be as simple as students spending three-fourths of the day with their homeroom teacher and then switching classes to receive instruction in one academic area from a specialist, a teacher who obtains a major or minor in a subject area, on the grade level (Gess-Newsome, 1999). The advantages for students having specialists as teachers include increased teacher content and curricular knowledge, time dedicated to that subject area, and centralization of content materials (Gess-Newsome, 1999). Another form of departmentalization at the elementary school level is a two-teacher team splitting instructional duties with one teacher assigned to science and math and the other teacher teaching the language arts and social studies (Contreras, 2009).

In addition to balancing the academic needs of students, administrators must consider the emotional and social needs of the elementary-aged child (Bishop, 1961;

Liew & McTigue, 2009; McPartland, 1987; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002). “The emphasis on end of year testing...takes away from educating the whole child. One cannot educate the whole child if, at the end of the day, only a specific element of that child is going to be tested” (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010, p. 191). According to Chan, Terry, and Bessette (2009), pre-adolescents’ psychological needs encompass a range of emotions, reflecting the most basic followed by higher level, increasingly complex needs. Maslow (1943) addressed the importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of students by stressing the following needs in his Hierarchy of Needs: the need to feel secure, accepted, safe, connected, and validated.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) believe in the importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of students, which resulted in the organization founding The Whole Child Initiative in 2007 to challenge the community, teacher, student, and family to work together to ensure that “each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2011, p. 1). The Whole Child Initiative focuses on five tenets that describe the whole child approach to education:

1. Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
2. Each student learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
3. Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
4. Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by

qualified, caring adults.

5. Each graduate is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.

(ASCD, 2011, p. 1).

The second tenet of The Whole Child Initiative is pertinent to the current study because it addresses the importance of high student achievement while meeting the physical, social, and emotional needs of the students. Martin, Fergus, and Noguera (2010) conducted a case study focusing on the needs of the whole child in a high performing elementary school for immigrant children. The authors used a mixture of individual and focus group interviews, observations, and document analysis to discover the whole child practices that positively impacted student achievement levels on standardized tests in English language arts. “The percentage of students achieving proficiency in fourth-grade English language arts rose from 19% in 1998-1999 to 84% in 2000-2001, and 98% attained proficiency in 2005-2006” (Martin, Fergus, & Noguera, p. 196). The findings revealed that the school constantly focused on the needs of the whole child by forming partnerships with community agencies and a local college so the school could provide health care, character education, experiential learning, and team building for the students and their families. In order for schools to increase the level of student achievement, curriculum and teaching practices must reflect the development of the whole child (Liew & McTigue, 2010).

The current study examined principals’ perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. Every spring administrators must decide if students should have one or more teachers teaching the academic subjects

of math, language arts, science, and social studies. This decision is difficult because effective leaders must balance the needs of the whole child with the expectations of the NCLB bill. After collecting my data through interviews and document analysis, I had the practical desire to provide administrators with qualitative data that may help them understand the reasons other administrators choose specific organizational structures at their elementary school. An administrator's perception of departmentalization or self-contained classrooms at the elementary level, in part, affects the success of the school in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of the whole child (Martin, Fergus, & Noguera, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Previous studies addressed different aspects of stakeholder perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; DelViscio & Muffs, 2007; Dropsey, 2004; Dunn, 1952; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009). Perception in this context refers to the beliefs, experiences, and opinions toward the organizational structure used in a respective schools, which impacts the instructional delivery of content, student achievement, and meeting the social/emotional needs of the students (Williams, 2009). A study conducted by Brogan (1970) examined the opinions and attitudes of fifth and sixth grade teachers and students concerning their current organizational structure, departmentalization. The study results indicated there was a need for more integration of subject matter and that the daily schedule of switching classes sometimes interfered with classroom activities. Conversely, the results also indicated that teachers and students were very enthusiastic about departmentalization, and that teachers had more time for subject preparation. A

more recent study by Liu (2011) utilized a qualitative case study method to describe teachers' perceptions of departmentalization at the elementary level. The research revealed many potential advantages of departmentalization: excitement for teaching a subject area of interest, specialization in a subject area, and an easier transition to middle school. Disadvantages of departmentalization included not knowing students on a more personal level, loss of integration across subject areas, student stress, and loss of time due to students moving from one classroom to another.

In an action research study based on fifth grade classrooms, Andrews (2006) examined the perceptions of students, teachers, and the principal of the school on departmentalization. Andrews was a fifth grade teacher in the Lincoln Public School System in Nebraska, and her school made the decision to departmentalize to reduce the stress of teachers preparing for every subject area. Data collection methods included interviewing the principal and administering a survey to the teachers. The results indicated the principal was supportive of departmentalization because the model was highly effective for this particular team of teachers based on their academic strengths. The principal shared with Andrews that in the past she both supported and denied requests by teachers to departmentalize because it depended on the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers. The findings from this study showed what this principal felt was important when making a decision about organizational structures. Andrews' study examined this topic from the perspective of one principal and one school; whereas, my study addressed this topic from the perspective of six principals and resulted in six themes practicing administrators may consider when making a decision on organizational structures at the elementary level.

There are many studies (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; DelViscio & Muffs, 2007; Dropsey, 2004; Dunn, 1952; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009) that provide data on the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level; however, very few examine principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms (Andrews, 2006; Yearwood, 2011). Principals at the elementary level make the final decision on the organizational structure of the grade levels, and additional data could help other administrators understand how principals' perceptions of organizational structure may or may not influence the decision-making process involved in establishing a particular organizational structure.

Study Overview and Purpose

The current study reviewed literature such as Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, and The Whole Child Initiative (2007). In addition, the study reviewed several related topics such as the social/emotional needs of students, student achievement, and the perceptions of principals, parents, students, and teachers in relation to organizational structures at the elementary level. Schools have the challenge of balancing the social/emotional needs of students with the need for all students to pass the annual achievement test. The current study provides data from a specific context for both new and veteran administrators that may help them better understand the decisions other principals make on organizational structure. This data is important as it may lead to a decision, which can affect children within the school as well as the success of the organization. Since each principal makes the final decision on the organizational structure of his or her school, it is imperative that

we provide as much information on this phenomenon as possible in order to help inform principals' decisions.

I utilized a constructivist research paradigm to frame this study. This paradigm focuses on understanding multiple worldviews in hopes of inductively developing a pattern of meaning based on the data collected (Creswell, 2009). Constructivism supports reality as constructed through the interaction of the researcher with the participants (Paul, 2005; Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007). A constructivist approach also attempts to understand meaning within the context of the natural setting and seeks to represent the positions of many stakeholders (Paul, 2005). In using this paradigm, I looked for themes among interviews with six principals and document analysis of the six master schedules for each of the schools included in the study in hopes of making sense of principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. According to Creswell, "Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work...the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (2009, p. 8). Within the constructivist research paradigm, I employed a basic interpretive qualitative methodology where my goal was to discover and understand principals' perspectives through interviews and document analysis (Merriam, 2002). This basic interpretive approach enabled me to inductively analyze the data to identify themes that cut across the experience of all participants (Merriam, 2002).

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. The goal of the study was to discover themes

among the perceptions of principals who chose departmentalization, supported self-contained classrooms, or used a combination of both organizational structures at the elementary level. The data collected from principal interviews and analysis of master schedules may provide insights for other administrators to help them make sense of how other principals determine what is best for students, teachers, and the academic achievement of their school. Previous studies showed that both student achievement and meeting the social and emotional needs of students influenced the decision of the organizational structure of an elementary school (Brogan, 1970; Dropsey, 2004; Harris, 1996; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009). This study applied research on Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies to the decision-making process of organizational structures because they influence student achievement and the ability to meet the social and emotional needs of the students (ASCD, 2011; Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010).

Research Question

One overarching research question guided this basic interpretive qualitative study, *“What are principals’ perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level?”*

Conceptual Frameworks

Two conceptual frameworks, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies informed the research for the current study. I chose these two frameworks because they are at the heart of the debate between departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school

level. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs represents the challenge schools face in trying to provide students with both their deficiency (relationships) and growth (academics) needs. Schiro's concept of curriculum ideologies represents the opposing curriculum forces of a learner centered classroom (self-contained) and a scholar academic classroom (departmentalization).

Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Abraham Maslow's (1943, 1971) theory of human motivation is one of two conceptual frameworks chosen for this study due to its focus on both the deficiency and growth needs of students. Maslow based his Hierarchy of Needs Theory on a synthesized body of research describing a series of stages of human development leading to fully functioning, responsible individuals (Huitt, 2007). All individuals begin at the bottom level of the hierarchy with only a few reaching the top level. Advancement to the next level depends on mastery of an individual's current level. The first four levels are deficiency needs, and the remaining four levels are growth needs (Minton, 2008). The deficiency stages begin at the first, most basic level of the physiological need of water, food, and shelter and then moves through the stages of safety, love, and esteem. The need for safety includes a child's preference for an undisrupted routine, an orderly world, and a structured environment (Maslow, 1943). A child masters the stage of love when he or she feels love from others and a sense of belonging in life (Minton, 2008). Finally, the esteem stage meets the individual's need "to achieve, be competent, and gain approval and recognition" (Huitt, 2007, p. 1).

Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory continues with the four growth needs consisting of the need to know, aesthetic level, self-actualization needs, and

finally, the transcendence level (Maslow, 1971). If students come to school with the initial deficiency stages met, schools can focus on the need to know stage that helps a child develop his or her cognitive abilities and the aesthetic stage that helps children to become emotionally involved in their schoolwork (Minton, 2008). The self-actualization stage shows that the individual has become everything he or she is capable of becoming and accepts full responsibility for his or her life (Maslow, 1971). The transcendence level is the final stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and it connects the individual to others by helping them realize their full potential (Huitt, 2007). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory supports the notion that when an adult satisfies a child's needs at one stage, the child then becomes motivated to satisfy his or her needs at the next level of the hierarchy. Because a child feels satisfied in previous levels, the current need becomes the most important need to fulfill.

This framework is important to elementary schools because the organizational structure of the school may affect how far students advance in Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory. For example, Becker (1987) examined the effects of varying school and classroom organizational structures on students from different social backgrounds and abilities by focusing on the areas of socioeconomic variables, race, and residential instability. Results indicated that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds benefited from having one teacher all day for every academic subject. Becker's findings supported the self-contained classroom over departmentalization for students of lower socioeconomic status. In another study, McPartland (1987) addressed the issue of high quality subject-matter instruction with positive teacher/student relationships. His results indicated self-contained classroom instruction benefits

teacher/student relationships, while departmentalization improves the quality of instruction. McPartland's findings demonstrated the challenges administrators face in deciding on the type of organizational structure to employ. According to his study, self-contained classrooms better met the deficiency needs of students; whereas, the departmentalized setting fulfilled the growth needs of the students. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory provided this study with an important conceptual framework that considered the social and emotional needs of a child while stressing the importance of the child reaching his or her fullest academic potential. Administrators have the challenge of deciding if departmentalization or self-contained classrooms better meet all of the above needs of their students and exploring the perceptions of elementary school principals may provide important insights to help understand this decision-making process.

Curriculum Ideologies. Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies served as the second conceptual framework for this study due to the effect of an elementary school's organizational structure on the different components of curriculum theory: aims, knowledge, the child, learning, teaching, and evaluation. These ideologies, or philosophies, advocate very different purposes for schooling and very different methods of achieving those respective purposes (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). Curriculum ideologies stimulated improvement in American schools and caused conflicts that inhibited progress in the development of the school curriculum (Schiro). The competition among the four ideologies (scholar academic, social efficiency, learner centered, and social reconstruction) stimulated advocates of each to develop increasingly powerful curricula, instructional methods, and research bases, which resulted in improved instruction for children (Schiro). The four ideologies differ in their educational philosophy,

instructional objectives, and the purpose of knowledge. The scholar academic ideology follows perennialism with the instructional objective to cultivate the intellect by focusing on classical subject areas with the goal of students mastering timeless knowledge. The social efficiency ideology adheres to essentialism with the instructional objective of educating a competent person who has the essential skills to be successful in life. The learner centered ideology follows progressivism with the instructional objective to promote a democratic, social living where knowledge leads to growth and development of the individual. Finally, the social reconstruction ideology focuses on reconstructionism with the instructional objective of improving society through education with the knowledge of skills and subjects needed to identify and eliminate problems in society (Ornstein, 2011).

The four curriculum ideologies discussed above influence the contemporary curriculum used in the State of Georgia with the social efficiency ideology being the most dominant due to adoption of a standards-based curriculum. The Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) serve as the teachers' guide for what the state expects students to know, understand, do, and master by the end of the academic school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Best practices from research, professional organizations, and other states influenced the creation of the standards (Williams, 2009). Due to the GPS, and eventually, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) guiding instruction in the State of Georgia, teachers follow the social efficiency curriculum ideology. This approach advocates for the use of educational objectives or standards as the criteria by which teachers select curriculum materials, outline content, develop instructional procedures, and prepare tests (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008; Tyler, 1949). The State of Georgia, as well

as other states in the country, adopted the CCSS over the past two years and will begin using the standards in their curriculum during the 2012-2013 school year (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The CCSS define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 educational experiences so they will graduate from high school fully prepared for college and their intended careers (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The standards align with college and work expectations and include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The standards are evidence- and research-based and informed by other top performing organizations so students can compete in the global economy. Both the GPS and CCSS annual assessments measure the achievement levels of the elementary students in grades 3 through 5 (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The State of Georgia defines student achievement as a student meeting or exceeding expectations on the annual reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies CRCT test. Students, teachers, and schools meet grade level standards and have a high level of student achievement at the school if all or almost all students pass the CRCT (Williams, 2009).

Despite specific mandates by the state, departmentalization at the elementary level may encourage teachers to follow the scholar academic ideology, which considers the purpose of education as “giving the same quality of schooling to all by requiring a program of study that is both liberal and general, and that is, in several, crucial, overarching respects, one and the same for every child” (Adler, 1982, p. 178). Self-contained classrooms at the elementary level may encourage teachers to follow more learner centered ideologies, which place the goal of education at “cooperatively

constructing rigorous and interesting courses centered on students' interests and talents" (Noddings, 2003, p. 432). Despite the State of Georgia following a social efficiency ideology with standards, educators within the state believe in different curriculum ideologies and those beliefs will affect instruction in their classroom (Schiro, 2008). The organizational structure of an elementary school can have a long-term effect on the curriculum ideologies of the teachers and administrators at that school, which directly affects the children in the building (Schiro, 2008).

Due to most of the prior research on organizational structures addressing the social/emotional needs of children and the achievement levels of the students, I felt that Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies should be the conceptual frameworks for this study. I believe that these conceptual frameworks are at the heart of the debate between departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. Prior research suggests the organizational structure a principal chooses will greatly affect if students are able to advance beyond the deficiency needs and to the growth needs of self-actualization where the child becomes everything that he or she is capable of (Maslow, 1943, 1971). The curriculum ideologies differ in their purpose for schools and the curriculum taught within the school (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). For example, the learner centered ideology, which supports the self-contained organizational structure, has a goal that is very clear, "serving as a reminder of what really matters to learner centered advocates: it is the goal of self-realization, or what the psychologist Abraham Maslow called self-actualization"

(Ellis, 2004, p. 41). The conceptual underpinnings of this study provides a framework that will help practicing administrators understand why principals choose the organizational structure that he or she uses at the elementary level.

Limitations

Due to the contextual nature of this study, my goal was not to generalize the results to other schools and school systems. Instead, the study provided rich, descriptive data to principals interested in learning more about the meaning behind the organizational structures that their peers used at the elementary level. This descriptive data encourages transferability because the reader can take the findings from the study and decide if he or she can use them in his or her particular situation (Merriam, 2009). I also enhanced transferability by employing purposeful sampling. Since I interviewed principals who departmentalized, employed self-contained classrooms, or used a combination of both organizational structures, there may be a greater range of application by the readers of this study (Merriam, 2009). The transferability of study findings is important as other administrators may benefit from the data collected to help make decisions on which organizational structure best meets the academic and social/emotional needs of their students at the elementary level.

Researcher's Statement

I chose to use a constructivist paradigm for this study because I believe that reality is socially constructed and that principals' gradually build their own understanding of organizational structures through their experiences. I wanted to understand what meaning principals made of their experiences with organizational structures by talking with them in their social contexts (Glesne, 2011). My role was to take the multiple

realities co-constructed by the principals and myself during the course of this study to identify recurring themes supported by the data.

As a former teacher and current elementary school administrator, I taught in both elementary and middle school classrooms for eight years before becoming an assistant principal at the elementary school level five years ago. I taught in a departmentalized setting at both levels and felt that I would not be as effective teaching all subject areas in grades five through eight. In my opinion, there is a lot of content at this level and it is very rigorous. I also believe teachers, just like students, have strengths and weaknesses, and it is difficult to be an expert on reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies at the upper elementary/middle school levels. After I became an assistant principal, I realized that I would be making the organizational structure decision on a yearly basis. Most of the teachers in my school wanted to specialize in one or two subject areas, which influenced our administration to try different departmentalized models over the past few years in an attempt to honor their requests. As time passed, my principal and I started feeling pressure from NCLB bill mandates and the importance of every child passing the CRCT each year. These pressures ultimately helped us become supportive of departmentalization. We believed teachers needed to specialize in subject areas and have fewer preparations so they could spend more time designing engaging lessons and meeting the needs of their students. Following this decision, we realized some students were not socially and emotionally capable of handling more than one teacher at the elementary level. Some students could not stay organized with more than one teacher, and other students could not handle the rigor and quantity of homework from having more than one teacher. I saw students losing their papers when they switched

classes, and some students reported to me that too many teachers would give homework on the same night, which overwhelmed them. Some parents also told us that they believed it was not developmentally appropriate for elementary students to have more than one teacher. Due to the above challenges related to these organizational structures, we decided to implement a combination of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms during the 2011-2012 school year. We have one teacher in a self-contained classroom and two teams of two teachers participating in departmentalization. This allowed us to be strategic regarding which students we placed in each form of organizational structure. As one can see, my principal and I struggled with this issue for five years and continue to question which organizational structure is best for students.

The data from this study helps to explore the reasons principals in one county in the State of Georgia chose departmentalization or self-contained classrooms for the organizational structure of their elementary school. When I shared the idea for this study with others in my school system, I heard many positive comments about the topic. For example, the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning sent a closed-ended survey to all elementary principals during the previous school year asking for the organizational structure the principal uses at each grade level (Elementary Principals Class Model Survey, 2011). The survey answered what organizational structure principals implemented, and my goal was to highlight the perceptions of principals related to this decision-making process. I will report the results from my study to the Assistant Superintendent, so that he has a better understanding of the decisions that principals make. Teachers at my school are also very interested in this topic, because the principal and I make this important decision regarding organizational structure on a

yearly basis and our decision greatly affects the teachers in our building. For example, our decision determines how many students each teacher will teach, how many and what subjects each teacher must prepare for, and how closely teachers will be working with one another. The data collected from this study will inform my future decisions about which organizational structure I should use at my school.

After researching previous studies on this topic, I found that most studies examined this topic from the teachers, parents, and/or students' perception and not the principals' perception (Brogan, 1970; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009). Additionally, I found studies on principals' perceptions of other educational topics but only a limited number of studies on organizational structures (Andrews, 2006; Yearwood, 2011). I concluded that there are not many studies examining this topic from the principals' perspective. My goal was to fill the gap that exists in current literature as well as bring an awareness of the importance of examining this topic from the principal's perspective.

Summary

Administrators often have the difficult decision of deciding if they should have departmentalization or self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level (Andrews, 2006). After reviewing prior studies (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; Dropsey, 2004; Harris, 1996; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009), this decision depended on student achievement and the social/emotional needs of the students. The NCLB heightened the importance of accountability in the schools, which made the decision of departmentalization or self-contained classrooms even more critical. The

goal of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to discover principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, study overview and purpose, research question, guiding conceptual frameworks, limitations, and a researcher's statement. Chapter 2 will expand on the introduction in Chapter 1 by providing an in-depth review of literature on this topic with specific focus on the following areas: (1) Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, (2) Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, (3) meeting the social/emotional needs of the students, (4) having high levels of student achievement, and (5) the perceptions of the different stakeholders involved with the organizational structures. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed description of the methodology through the research design, sample selection, descriptions of the schools selected for the current study, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, researcher's statement, and a summary. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the principals' interviews, which resulted in six major findings based on the research question. Additionally, the documents with the master schedules will provide supportive data to the study by showing how schools departmentalized and when the transitions took place. Chapter 5 will discuss the six major findings within the context of prior studies and the conceptual frameworks for the current study, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Finally, the chapter will cover limitations, future research, and include a conclusion.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review begins by examining the conceptual frameworks for this study, which includes Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Both of these conceptual frameworks support and inform research on organizational structures, and their relationship to student achievement and meeting the social and emotional needs of the child. Subsequent sections of this chapter examine research on meeting the social and emotional needs of students, having a high level of student achievement at the elementary level, and listening to student, parent, and teacher perceptions on school organizational structures. In addition, the chapter stresses the significance of this study in relation to other studies as well as the limited research on principals' perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary level. Finally, this review of the literature concludes by summarizing the importance of the conceptual frameworks to this study. This section also raises some valid questions that connect the conceptual frameworks to school organizational structures.

Conceptual Frameworks

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation. Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation, based on the thirteen tenets below, was one of the conceptual frameworks used to guide this study.

1. The integrated wholeness of the organism must be one of the foundation stones of motivation theory.
2. The hunger drive (or any physiological drive) was rejected as a centering point or model for a definitive theory of motivation.
3. Such a theory should stress and center itself upon ultimate or basic goals rather than partial or superficial ones, upon ends rather than means to these ends. Such a stress would imply a more central place for unconscious than for conscious motivations.
4. There are usually available various cultural paths to the same goal. Therefore conscious, specific, local-cultural desires are not as fundamental in motivation theory as the more basic, unconscious goals.
5. Any motivated behavior must be understood to be a channel through which many basic needs may be simultaneously expressed or satisfied. Typically an act has more than one motivation.
6. Practically all organismic states are to be understood as motivated and as motivating.
7. Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one human need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need.
8. Lists of drives will get us nowhere for various theoretical and practical reasons.
9. Classifications of motivations must be based upon goals rather than upon instigating drives or motivated behavior.
10. Motivation theory should be human-centered rather than animal-centered.

11. The situation or the field in which the organism reacts must be taken into account but the field alone can rarely serve as an exclusive explanation for behavior. Field theory cannot be a substitute for motivation theory.
12. Not only the integration of the organism must be taken into account, but also the possibility of isolated, specific, partial, or segmental reactions. It has since been necessary to add to these another affirmation.
13. Motivation theory is not synonymous with behavior theory. While behavior is almost always motivated, it is almost always biologically, culturally, and situationally determined as well (pp. 1-3).

The above tenets are important to the current study because they set the foundation for Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a visual representation of his Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1954). The theory addresses different deficiency and growth needs students and adults experience on a daily basis (Maslow, 1954). Maslow's (1943) original Hierarchy of Needs Theory had five stages including physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization. In 1971, Maslow expanded the Hierarchy of Needs to include need to know, aesthetic, and transcendence stages. According to Minton (2008), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory offers a simple and clear explanation of why some children are not successful in school by highlighting four deficiency needs that children require before they can benefit from the school experience.

The first and seventh tenets are important to this study because they address characteristics that are important to the organizational structure of an elementary school. These characteristics include the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child and

the reality that advancement through the stages depends on meeting the child's needs at each stage. The first tenet specifically addresses the importance of meeting all of a child's needs in order for him or her to have the motivation to learn (Maslow, 1943). John Dewey (1938) agreed with Maslow on the importance of holism and the cultivation of motivation being the key to the development of intelligence. In conclusion, a child will lack motivation to learn unless his or her home or school meets the deficiency needs (Maslow, 1943).

The seventh tenet explains the arrangement of human needs in a hierarchal sense, and the reality that advancement through the stages depends on meeting the child's needs at each previous stage (Maslow, 1943). A child will not be ready for the growth needs unless the school or home meets his or her deficiency needs (Huitt, 2007). If schools focus on just the deficiency needs, the students will have their basic needs met, but the students will not have the opportunity to aspire to what he or she dreams of becoming (Ellis, 2004). If schools ignore the deficiency needs and only focus on the growth needs, students will not be able to make meaning of the content that teachers present (Minton, 2008). Maslow (1968) believed in the potential of children and stated that healthy children enjoy gaining new skills and capacities. He felt that if we gave children a full choice in educational opportunities, they would choose what is good for their growth (Maslow, 1968). The challenge for elementary schools is to meet both the deficiency and growth needs. The organizational structure chosen for a particular elementary school may affect its ability to meet these needs (Williams, 2009). Figure 1 is a visual representation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

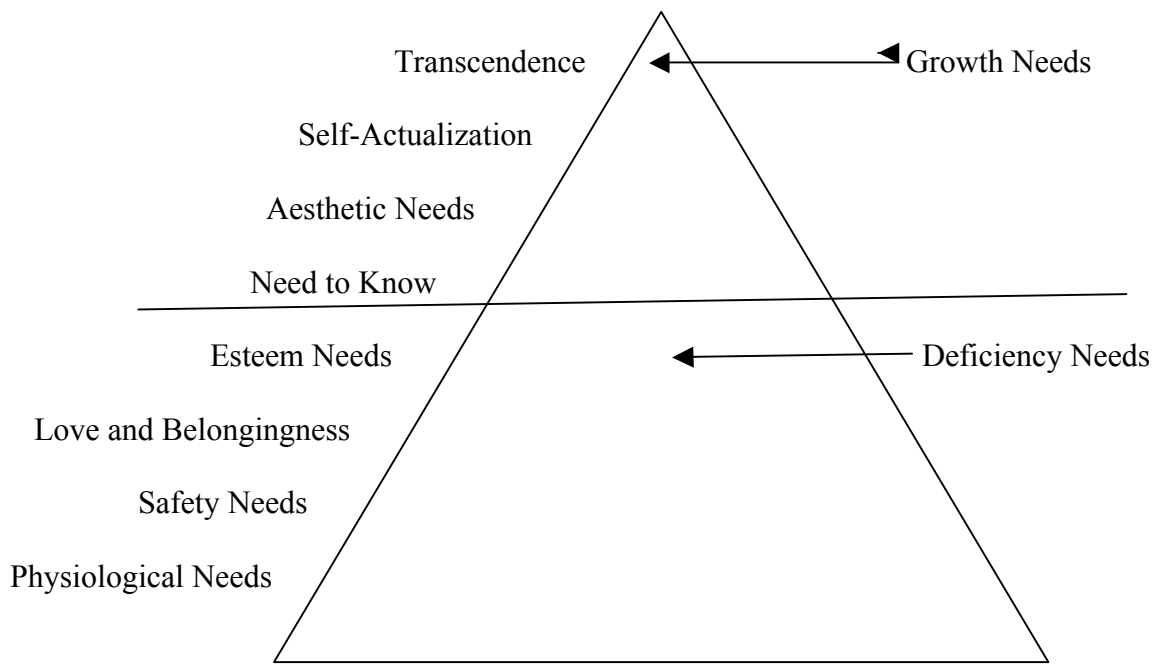


Figure 1: Visual representation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Huitt, 2007)

According to Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, there are four levels of deficiency needs, which include physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs. Schools address most of the physiological needs by providing breakfast, lunch, recess, snacks during the after school program, climate control, naptime for the youngest students, and water fountains (Huitt, 2007). Maslow stressed the importance of the concept of homeostasis, which refers to the “body’s automatic efforts to maintain a constant normal state of the blood stream” (1943, p. 3). If a child’s body is lacking any of the physiological needs, he or she develops an appetite for that need (Maslow, 1943). After meeting their physiological needs, students turn to the need of feeling safe and wanting a predictable, orderly world (Maslow, 1943). Teachers need to create a physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe classroom so students are able to achieve success (Brickman, 2005). Furthermore, Brickman (2005)

suggests a structured classroom should consist of clearly defined and established rules and procedures where the students feel that they can take risks.

Research highlights the effect of school organizational structure on the love and belongingness level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McPartland, 1987). McPartland's (1987) study used data from a sample of 433 schools in the Pennsylvania Educational Quality Assessment (PEQA) to examine the effects of self-contained classroom instruction and departmentalization on student-teacher relations. Students answered fourteen survey questions about their perceptions of their school with one of the questions being: "My teacher understands me" (McPartland, p. 25). The results from the survey suggested a positive correlation between teacher-student relationships and self-contained classroom organizational structures (McPartland). Affectionate relationships with teachers, other students, and counselors, where students can be involved in giving and receiving love, satisfy the love and belongingness level (Maslow, 1943). The esteem needs level addresses the need for a "stable, firmly based, high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" (Maslow, 1943, p. 11). At this stage teachers need to build students' levels of competence, achievement, and independence and teach students how to respect others (Minton, 2008). Once homes and/or schools meet students' deficiency needs, teachers are able to move them to the growth needs of need to know, aesthetic, self-actualization, and self-transcendence levels of the hierarchy (Maslow, 1971).

The need to know level is the stage in which students develop their cognitive abilities and the level that schools should operate at a minimum (Minton, 2008). At this point on the hierarchy, students move beyond deficiency needs allowing schools to help

students know, understand, and explore academic subjects (Huitt, 2007). The aesthetic level adds an emotional component to learning where the child connects with the content resulting in a greater likelihood of academic success (Blum, 2005). The self-actualization level is the level where students realize their full potential and become everything they are capable of being (Maslow, 1943). This is also the stage where students demonstrate more responsibility for their own life and the decisions they make (Minton, 2008). Self-transcendence is the last level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and it is where a student connects to something bigger than himself or herself (Huitt, 2007). At the self-transcendence stage, one may see students using their emotional, social, and academic skills to design, collect money, and build a park for a neighborhood in need.

In addition to the influence of organizational structure on the ability of children to attend to various stages of Maslow's model, prior research also suggests the organizational structure of an elementary school may affect student achievement level (Yearwood, 2011). Yearwood conducted a study using a sample of 2,152 fifth grade students who attended public school in 14 rural counties in the Pioneer RESA (Regional Educational Service Agency) district in the State of Georgia. Student achievement scores on the 2010 reading and math Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) were the dependent variables in this study. The CRCT measures the achievement levels of elementary students in grades 3 through 5 in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The researcher used a causal-comparative design to determine whether there was a significant difference in fifth grade students' reading and math achievement scores due to classroom organizational type (departmentalized versus self-contained) as the independent variable. Results of the analyses found a significant

difference in 2010 mean reading and math CRCT scale scores based on organizational structure with higher scores resulting from departmentalization. According to Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the data from this study supports departmentalization as helping students achieve the need to know, aesthetic, and self-actualization stages.

The above discussion of Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory in relation to Yearwood (2011), supports this study because the organizational structure of an elementary school may affect how far students advance through Maslow's deficiency and growth needs. McPartland (1987) and Becker (1987) found that self-contained classrooms benefited students' relationship with their teachers, which helps students advance through the deficiency stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In contrast, Moore (2009), Williams (2009), and Yearwood discovered that departmentalization increased student achievement level in mathematics, which supports the growth stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Arguably, schools have a role in meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of all students and that is why further research may lead to an understanding of which organizational structure will better meet all of the various needs of our elementary students.

Schiro's Concept of Curriculum Ideologies. Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies is another conceptual framework important to this study as the organizational structure of an elementary school may affect the curriculum ideologies of the staff members at that school. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1859) commented on the worth of knowledge in response to how rapidly the world was changing and its effect on school curriculum. Schiro's curriculum ideologies addressed

Spencer's question by examining the different components of curriculum theory: aims, knowledge, the child, learning, teaching, and evaluation and how the curriculum evolved over the years. The four curriculum ideologies include scholar academic, social efficiency, learner centered, and social reconstruction, and they all "advocate very different purposes for schooling and very different methods of achieving those respective purposes" (Schiro, p. 1). The scholar academic ideology stresses the importance of all students receiving a liberal arts education structured around the essential knowledge identified by researchers and scholars (Adler, 1982; Bruner, 1966; Ellis, 2004; Hirsch, 1987; Schiro). In contrast, the social efficiency ideology stresses the importance of educational objectives and standards that demonstrate a difference between the knowledge students have before they begin instruction as compared to after instruction is complete (Tyler, 1949; Schiro). Next, the learner centered ideology advocates that the school experience should allow a student the freedom and opportunity to achieve what he or she is able of becoming and reach the goal Maslow referred to as self-actualization (Ellis, 2004; Schiro). Lastly, the social reconstruction ideology supports integrating the curriculum by "infusing elements from the students' personal lives as well as studying social topics and challenges from the view of underrepresented groups" (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010, p. 45).

Teachers in the state of Georgia follow the social efficiency ideology due to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) guiding what students should know, understand, do, and master by the end of the academic school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The state recently adopted the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and those math and English language arts standards will guide instruction

beginning in the 2012-2013 school year by preparing graduates for college and careers (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Both the GPS and the CCSS follow the social efficiency ideology because of the behavioral terminology of the standards that indicate students must demonstrate mastery of curriculum objectives (Cotti, 2004; Schiro, 2008).

The social efficiency ideology rationale came from the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911), which stressed the importance of management and efficiency in the workplace. Franklin Bobbitt (1918), considered the father of the social efficiency ideology, applied Taylor's ideas to the problems of educational management, supervision, and curriculum (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). Followers of this ideology believe that science can provide the basis for building a curriculum that meets the needs of society (Zeichner & Liston, 1990). The social efficiency ideology differs from other ideologies because the curriculum has specific and observable skills that dictate student outcomes (Schiro, 2008).

Despite the fact that all Georgia public school teachers follow the social efficiency ideology by using the state-mandated GPS and eventually the CCSS curriculum, teachers also hold beliefs rooted in the other three ideologies, which can change over time (Cotti, 2004; Schiro, 1992). The organizational structure of an elementary school may influence this evolution of the curriculum beliefs of teachers in the school (Cotti, 2004; Schiro, 1992). Additionally, administrators' or teachers' curriculum ideologies may influence the organizational structure of the school (Cotti, 2004; Schiro, 1992). Schiro (1992) investigated 76 educators' perceptions on changes in their beliefs on curriculum ideologies by exploring both the frequency of, and

reasons for, the change. These 76 educators, enrolled in graduate courses in curriculum theory at Boston College, took an ideological preferences inventory (Schiro). Schiro used a biographical method, as described by Denzin (1989), to study and collect “personal life documents, stories, accounts, and narratives which describe turning-point moments in individuals’ lives” (p. 255). The participants had background knowledge of the four ideologies, therefore, they understood the conceptual framework within which the study took place; however, their professors did not pressure the participants to favor or endorse one ideology over another (Schiro). Schiro asked the participants to draw ideology life history diagrams and to write a life history essay allowing participants to describe, in detail, how their ideologies evolved through the years. His results indicated that all educators in the study had significant changes in their curriculum ideologies with the mean being 2.9 changes and a median of 3 changes. The average participant spent four years within a single ideology before changing to another curriculum ideology and shared twelve major reasons for their ideology change.

Four of the major reasons for the ideology change in the study described above, pertain to the focus of this study on organizational structures at the elementary level. These four reasons include school change, grade change, children and community needs, and job change from one teaching position to another teaching position. When teachers move from lower grades to higher grades at the elementary level, they begin to adopt beliefs of the scholar academic ideology; whereas, teachers that move from upper elementary grades to lower elementary grades begin to adopt a learner centered ideology (Schiro, 1992). The study also found that a change in superintendent or principal might influence the beliefs on curriculum ideology, which can result in a change to the

curriculum at the school level. Results also indicated that when student populations change within a community or an individual school, it might impact the beliefs of curriculum ideologies within that school by typically moving staff toward learner centered or social reconstruction ideologies. Lastly, as administrators moved from the classroom to the administrative position, data showed they moved towards the social efficiency ideology because of the classroom control issues they dealt with on a daily basis (Schiro, 1992). This data was important to the current study because it showed how curriculum beliefs may influence the organizational structure of an elementary school and how the organizational structure of an elementary school may influence the curriculum beliefs of the staff members at the school.

Cotti (2004) examined how teachers use children's literature in the teaching of mathematics and how their curriculum ideologies impacted their use of the literature to teach mathematical concepts. Cotti used *The Mathematics and Children's Literature Belief Inventory* (1997) to identify teachers' ideologies and how their ideological beliefs influenced the use of children's literature in mathematics. The inventory addressed six constructs including instructional purposes, teaching, learning, knowledge, childhood, and evaluation. Cotti's sample included 109 pre-service teachers and 18 practicing teachers in courses on teaching elementary school mathematics from two different universities in the Northeastern United States. After Cotti administered the inventory, teachers constructed graphs of their ideological preferences in relation to the use of children's literature in teaching mathematics concepts. Next, participants listened to lectures over the four ideologies and ended the course by reflecting on how they used literature to teach mathematical concepts after gaining knowledge of the ideologies. The

results indicated that 95% of pre-service teachers and 94% of practicing teachers used children's books during mathematics in alignment with their curriculum ideology. The study also found that 83% of the pre-service teachers and 67% of practicing teachers aligned with the learner centered ideology, 6% of the pre-service teachers and 11% of the practicing teachers aligned with the social reconstruction ideology, 1% of the pre-service teachers and 0% of the practicing teachers aligned with the scholar academic ideology, and none of the participants aligned with the social efficiency ideology. Lastly, results showed that 5% of pre-service teachers and 6% of practicing teachers did not have an ideological preference (Cotti). This data is notable as most of the states in America recently adopted the CCSS, which closely follow the social efficiency ideology. This could mean teachers would probably prefer a curriculum based on the interests of students (learner centered ideology) instead of standards driving instruction. The self-contained organizational structure supports the learner centered ideology with a focus on student interests (Schiro, 2008). In contrast, departmentalization follows the scholar academic ideology more closely with a focus on academic subjects over learner interests (Schiro, 2008). The organizational structure of a school may influence how teachers teach the curriculum to students, and if the school focuses on students or academic subjects (Aubrey, 1968; Ellis, 2004; Gutek, 1997; Harris, 1996; Slavin, 1988; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010).

According to Ellis (2004), schooling and curriculum advances four major goals that represent a shared vision of the results of schooling and different educational ideologies including academic knowledge, participatory citizenship, self-realization, and career opportunity. The organization of an elementary school determines if subject

matter or learner centered specialists teach students (Ellis). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) is on record stating that students should have subject specialists in mathematics beginning no later than fourth grade, which is in opposition to the learner centered ideology stressing the importance of the teacher/student relationship over subject matter knowledge (Ellis). Therefore, the NCTM's view on organizational structure supports the notion that departmentalization should begin by the fourth grade at the elementary level. Principals have to decide whether to follow recommended guidelines or make alternative decisions based on the needs of their schools. Additionally, principals must determine if teachers in self-contained classrooms can specialize in all subject areas, or if teachers in departmentalization are able to meet the needs of the whole child.

In a historical piece on curriculum ideologies, Aubrey (1968) examined the relationship between curriculum ideologies and the role that elementary teachers have in a school setting and concluded that teachers must coordinate instruction based on learners' academic and emotional needs, be a strong disciplinarian and shaper of moral values, and be a subject matter specialist, which addresses aspects of all curriculum ideologies. This research combined the strengths of both departmentalization and self-contained classrooms and supported both organizational structures. With that in mind, should schooling in the twenty-first century focus more on raising academic achievement and/or developing the whole child, and could departmentalization or self-contained classrooms meet both of these goals? That question was at the heart of the current research as leaders should consider the social, emotional, and academic needs of all students when deciding what organizational structure to use at the elementary level.

Departmentalization closely follows the scholar academic ideology, which emphasizes a liberal arts education where the teacher is a scholar and subject matter specialist in the areas in which he or she teaches (Adler, 1982; Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008; Zeichner & Liston, 1990). Figure 2 represents the discovery and dissemination of knowledge through the lens of the scholar academic ideology (Schiro, 2008).

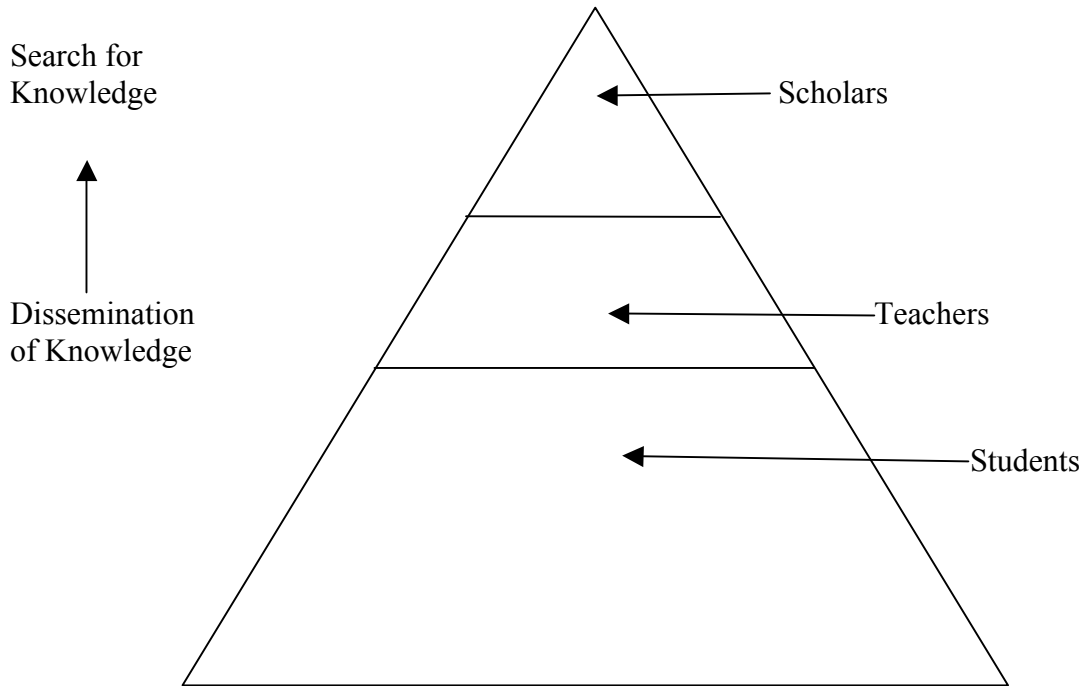


Figure 2: The hierarchical organization of a discipline from the scholar academic ideology viewpoint (Schiro, 2008).

Proponents of this ideology believe that the “teacher represents adult authority and is thought to be in better position than are children to make judgments about what knowledge and skills are crucial to a purposeful life” (Ellis, 2004, p. 119). The scholar academic ideology views students as creatures of intellect and expects them to learn the material and complete assignments (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008). Since teachers transmit the knowledge of subject matter to students, it is essential these educators have the background, knowledge, and skills in that discipline (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008).

Dewey (1916) did not support the separation of subjects and the idea of departmentalization because it did not reflect the interconnected world in which we live in. Instead, Dewey stressed the importance of building upon students' experiences and relating academic content to the problems of everyday life. Scholars search for knowledge that is not yet known, while teachers disseminate knowledge to students and students learn the knowledge of the discipline (Schiro, 2008). Table 1 represents the essential features of the scholar academic ideology.

Table 1: The Keys to the Scholar Academic Ideology Curriculum (Ellis, 2004)

Emphasis	*Subject matter from academic disciplines *Organized scope and sequence
Teaching	*Teacher as scholar/learner *Teacher directed curriculum *Variety of teaching strategies
Learning	*Mastery of subject matter *Student as novice learner
Environment	*Clear academic focus *Traditional disciplines *School as workplace
Assessment	*Formal examinations *Standards-based assessments

Self-contained classrooms closely follow the learner centered ideology, which emphasizes the needs and interests of the learner over the content of the subject matter

(Ellis, 2004; Noddings, 2003; Schiro, 2008; Zeichner & Liston, 1990). The learner centered school differs from the traditional school because teachers build the curriculum around the child's interests (Schiro, 2008). For example, a learner centered classroom emphasizes centers of interest for the school curriculum instead of focusing on academic subjects such as mathematics and reading (Schiro, 2008). Noddings (2003) believes "children are to be watched and tested to identify their talents and interests, and then they are to receive an education compatible with their demonstrated natures" (p. 428). This curriculum ideology focuses on each learner and builds on his or her growth and development (Ellis, 2004).

Zeichner and Liston (1990) built upon this learner centered ideology by describing three metaphors for the role of a teacher: (1) The teacher as naturalist has a skill in observation and is able to create an environment that is aligned with the children's interest, (2) The teacher as artist is able to provide children with a stimulating learning environment, and (3) The teacher as researcher has an experimental attitude towards teaching practices. Table 2 represents the essential features of the learner centered ideology.

Table 2: The Keys to the Learner Centered Ideology Curriculum (Ellis, 2004)

Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Focus on the individual *Personal growth and development *Learner interest *Emphasis on affect
Teaching	*Teacher as facilitator
Learning	*Incidental education
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Nurturing creativity *Stimulating *Playful atmosphere *Freedom of movement *Atmosphere of trust
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Learner-initiated *Growth oriented *Formative emphasis *Anecdotal, experiential *Non competitive

Not only do the above ideologies influence the decision to departmentalize or have self-contained classrooms, but they also play an important role in the social and emotional development and educational achievement of students at the elementary level (Liew & McTigue, 2010; Schiro, 2008; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). NCLB and standards-based accountability emphasizes academic needs (reading and math) over non-academic

needs (social/emotional needs); however, many of our students need a focus on the development of the whole child in order for them to be successful academically (Liew & McTigue, 2010; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). Research supports the notion that highly structured and teacher-directed classrooms that follow the scholar academic ideology are difficult for students with poor self-regulatory skills (Liew & McTigue, 2010). This type of classroom environment requires children to comply with classroom rules, work independently at their desk, and to cope with the frustrations of the new material they are learning (Liew & McTigue, 2010). In contrast, a learner centered curriculum is more flexible and allows teachers to be more responsive to the students' needs, which fosters a closer teacher/student relationship and positively impacts student achievement (Ellis, 2004; Liew & McTigue, 2010; Schiro, 2008). Liew and McTigue (2010) believe in mixing the beliefs of both ideologies and having "a balanced curriculum that includes both standardized and informal measurements, which focus on academic and social-emotional growth" (p. 9).

Meeting the Social/Emotional Needs of the Whole Child

John Dewey was a teacher, philosopher, and pragmatist who started the conversation on the need to educate the whole child and to encourage a free flow of ideas based on students' interests (Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). Dewey (1938) identified three important goals of educating the whole child through curriculum including (1) the development of intelligence, (2) the acquisition of socially useful skills, and (3) the healthy growth of the individual. Dewey also stressed the importance of teaching the whole child by paying close attention to the personal experiences of the learner when constructing lessons and addressing problems in society through the lesson.

A historical study conducted by Dunn (1952), examined if a standardized elementary school organizational structure is necessary to best meet the needs of the whole child. Dunn defined departmentalization as a method of school organization where teachers taught one subject or one group of related subjects, and she defined the self-contained classroom as a single classroom where the teacher instructs the students of a certain class in all subject areas. Dunn sent a questionnaire in 1950 to 104 cities in the United States to determine if sampled schools used departmentalization or self-contained classrooms and to determine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each organizational structure. The data indicated mixed results, but was more positive towards self-contained classrooms when considering the needs of the whole child. Results suggested the following: (1) departmentalization prevented the teacher from knowing the students intimately, (2) learning should be a continuous process and not based on time allotments, (3) departmentalization promoted compartmental learning instead of whole child learning, (4) departmentalization makes school a factory rather than a home for children, and (5) integration of subject areas is much more difficult in a departmental setting. In contrast, data indicated that departmentalization succeeds with stronger students and it tends to develop independence and self-reliance. Dunn concluded that if departmentalization is necessary, principals should keep it to a minimum so that students spend most of their day with the same teacher.

Dewey (1938) supported the rights and roles of immigrants in American society and believed that schools must constantly evolve to meet the changing needs of the students and society. Instead of American educational policies evolving to meet the needs of our immigrant students, our current system promotes a scholar academic

ideology focusing on a standards-based, high-stakes testing environment, which leads to high drop-out rates of our immigrant students (Au, 2007; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). Since the NCLB bill assesses reading and math for AYP purposes, schools are reducing instruction in other academic areas and limiting playtime (Au, 2007; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Stuckart & Glanz, 2010). Stuckart and Glanz (2010) believe that “NCLB stymies the growth of the whole child, and on a societal level, erodes democracy over time” (p. 55).

Becker (1987) conducted a study to examine the effects of varying school and classroom organizational structures on students from different social backgrounds and abilities by focusing on the areas of socioeconomic variables, race, and residential instability. He collected the data from the 1986 PEQA with 330 schools responding to the survey of school and classroom practices. The data analysis focused on five achievement tests including mathematics, written English, reading, science, and social studies. Results indicated students from lower socioeconomic statuses scored .20 standard deviations higher in self-contained classrooms compared with schools that had four or more teachers for those same subjects. Students in the low/middle socioeconomic group also scored .14 standard deviations higher in the self-contained classroom than the departmentalized model. In contrast, students in the high/middle and high socioeconomic groups scored .04 to .05 standard deviations higher in self-contained classrooms. These results indicated that self-contained classrooms benefited students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and would better support the needs of the whole child. This data was significant to the current study because it showed that schools with a higher free

and reduced lunch rate, indicating a higher proportion of students from lower socioeconomic groups, might benefit from self-contained classrooms.

A study conducted by McGrath and Rust (2002) addressed different aspects of meeting the social and emotional needs of elementary students and the academic achievement level of those students. The researchers examined the relationship between elementary school classroom organizational structures and standardized achievement scores, transition time between classes, and instructional time. The study included 103 fifth grade participants and 94 sixth grade participants from two schools in one school district in rural Tennessee. The students from school A attended departmentalized classrooms; whereas, the students from school B attended self-contained classrooms. The socioeconomic levels from each school were similar with approximately 27% of the students at each school receiving free or reduced lunch. Student scores from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), measuring the achievement of basic skills in reading, spelling, language, mathematics, study skills, science, and social studies, served as the dependent variable for the study. McGrath recorded both transition and instructional time for two full days through direct observation. Results indicated students in self-contained classrooms gained significantly more than those in departmentalized classes when considering the total battery, language arts, and science portions of the test with no differences found in reading, mathematics, and social studies. The average transition time of 3.27 minutes in self-contained classrooms was significant compared to the departmentalized classrooms with an average transition time of 4.55 minutes. Despite these differences in transition time, there was no significant difference in actual instructional time with departmentalized classes averaging 48 minutes of

instruction per hour while self-contained classrooms averaged 46 minutes of instruction per hour. Interestingly, anecdotal observations also revealed that self-contained classrooms offered instruction in additional academic areas not addressed in the departmentalized classroom including computer usage, creative writing, and journal writing. This finding was congruent with the findings from other studies supporting the notion that departmentalization and scheduled times to switch classes should not guide elementary schools because it limits what teachers can offer their students instructionally (Dunn, 1952; Harris, 1996; McGrath & Rust, 2002).

McPartland (1987) used data from a sample of 433 schools in the PEQA to examine the quality of the subject matter along with teacher/student relationships with the goal of discovering the effects of departmentalization. He hypothesized that departmentalization would produce higher quality instruction while self-contained classrooms would produce better teacher/student relationships. McPartland based his hypothesis on the belief that departmentalized instruction allowed teachers to specialize while self-contained classrooms allowed teachers to meet the needs of the whole child. The students in the study completed achievement tests in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, and analytical thinking and answered 14 survey questions about their perceptions of the school. The results from the study indicated more positive teacher/student relationships in self-contained classrooms as opposed to departmentalization. In contrast, results indicated that departmentalization improved the quality of instruction by having teachers specialize in subject matter. McPartland concluded that schools could use departmentalization as long as the homeroom teacher assumes responsibility for the needs of the whole child in their homeroom class, or the

school would need to assign the student to a staff member as a mentor. This would provide all students with a teacher/staff member who would care for their academic, social, and emotional needs while still receiving instruction from various teachers. Typically, teachers meet with their assigned students on a weekly basis. If a school decided to use the self-contained organizational structure, he recommended professional learning opportunities or specialized support staff to help self-contained teachers become specialists in all subject areas. McPartland's research is pertinent to this study because the results revealed the strengths and weaknesses of both organizational structures. Additionally, it shows the necessity of further research to determine why principals chose the organizational structure for their school and if it relates to meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of elementary students. The goal of the current study was to discover themes among principals that departmentalize, have self-contained classrooms, or have a combination of both organizational structures.

To summarize the various studies discussed previously, Liew and McTigue's (2010) research stressed the importance of the developmental and academic achievement needs of learners being integrated into all aspects of the school curriculum to allow the school to meet the needs of the whole child. Parker (2009) passionately supported the idea of the whole child by stating, "We wish we could focus our attention on the children we are teaching...eliminate school organizational plans that only makes sense to adults, but do nothing to enhance the educational experiences of the children they serve" (p. 325). This section of the literature review focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of the whole child. All of the studies examined above (Becker, 1987; Dunn, 1952; McGrath & Rust, 2002; McPartland, 1987) supported the notion that self-

contained classrooms better met the social and emotional needs of elementary students; however, McGrath and Rust (2002) also concluded that departmentalization was more effective in supporting student achievement, which leads to the next section of the literature review. The current study helped bridge this gap in data by examining principals' perceptions of organizational structures with a lens guided by Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, which addressed the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.

Student Achievement

The late American educator Robert Maynard Hayes (1936) stated, "The best education for the best is the best education for all" (p. 177). Hayes worked on the Great Books project with Mortimer Adler (1982), which focused on the knowledge of great ideas that occurred throughout history. Their belief was that all students should receive the same course of study that focused on academic learning. According to Adler, these beliefs are at the heart of principals' desire for all students to be successful academically and for the school to reflect a high student level of achievement. Several studies in the past examined the association between organizational structure and student achievement based on standardized testing (DeViscio & Muffs, 2007; Garcia, 2007; Harris, 1996; Moore, 2009; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011).

Moore (2009) conducted a study to determine if associations existed between classroom organizational structures and student achievement scores on the Criterion-Referenced Tests/Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (CRT/TCAP) assessments. He collected data from fourth and fifth grade classrooms in six public school systems in northeast Tennessee. Independent sample *t* tests indicated no

significant differences in fourth and fifth grade student achievement scores in language arts, science, and social studies between students in self-contained classrooms and students in departmentalized classrooms. However, there was a significant difference in achievement in math scores with the fifth grade data supporting the departmentalized classrooms; fourth grade students revealed no differences in math. Moore believed that future studies should include more school systems with a larger sample of teachers and students in the study. Due to the mixed results in his outcomes, this study highlighted the gap in our understanding of student achievement and the organizational structure of an elementary school.

Williams (2009) also examined the effect of self-contained classrooms and departmentalized classrooms on student achievement by using the mathematics CRCT achievement of fifth grade general education students. Fifth grade students from the State of Georgia were used as the study group, and the sample included over 4,500 students for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years in 57 elementary schools from twelve counties in the northeast Georgia. Williams divided the data into two specific sets: self-contained classrooms and departmentalized classrooms. She used a causal-comparative research design for this *ex-post facto* research study and a two-sample *t* test to determine the significant differences between the mean scale scores of the two organizational structures. In 2007, 31 schools (54%) had self-contained classrooms while 26 (46%) utilized departmentalization. In 2008, 31 schools (54%) used departmentalization while 26 schools (46%) had self-contained classrooms. Results indicated there was no significant difference between students taught in self-contained classrooms and students taught in departmentalization based on how many students

passed or failed the CRCT. However, there was a significant difference between the percentage of students meeting and exceeding on the CRCT with the departmentalized structure having a higher percentage. The results from this study supported the fifth grade math results from Moore's (2009) study with departmentalization benefiting the student achievement level in the area of math.

A more recent quantitative study conducted by Yearwood (2011) also had the goal of determining whether fifth grade students who received instruction in a departmentalized or a self-contained setting demonstrated significantly different scores on the reading and math portions of the CRCT. Yearwood's study consisted of 2,152 fifth graders who attended public school in 14 rural counties within the Pioneer RESA district in northeast Georgia. She also used a causal-comparative design to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the reading and math achievement scores based on the 2010 Georgia CRCT. The findings indicated that students who received instruction in departmentalized settings scored significantly higher on both the reading and math portions of the 2010 Georgia CRCT. Yearwood's results supported data from both Williams' (2009) and Moore's (2009) studies by showing a significant student achievement increase in math scores due to departmentalized classrooms. In addition, Yearwood's study discovered a significant difference in reading scores with the departmentalized setting revealing higher scores. According to the above studies, teacher specialization in the area of math may be one benefit of departmentalization at the elementary level.

In contrast to the above studies, Harris (1996) discovered that the self-contained organizational structure allowed for more instructional time due to a lack of class

transition and more time-on-task. She also discovered that student achievement was significantly higher for students in self-contained classrooms than for those in departmentalized classrooms. Harris conducted her study in the Chicago area with a random sample of 30 out of 53 sixth grade students who received instruction by departmentalization and a second random sample of 30 out of 54 sixth grade students that received instruction by self-contained classrooms. She used the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) to compare students' results. The results revealed that students who received instruction in the departmentalized setting did not score as high as students from the self-contained setting. The departmentalized group had a mean reading achievement score of 5.51 and the self-contained group had a mean score of 6.1. This finding revealed a significant difference at the .05 level in favor of the self-contained classroom. Harris stated, "Sixth grade students may be too immature to adjust to a new routine and do not need constant change" (p. 9). The results from this study contradicted the results from Yearwood's (2011) study on which organizational structure is better for student achievement in the area of reading. Harris' study included a small sample for the *t* test, which could affect her generalizability. Future studies should continue to examine student achievement in the area of reading to determine which organizational structure is more effective.

Garcia (2007) examined a different aspect of organizational structures by comparing semi-departmentalized classrooms with fully departmentalized classrooms. He used the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to measure the achievement level of fifth graders on the science portion of the test. Garcia employed a causal comparative research design to study six elementary schools that had similar

demographics according to the Texas Education Agency. Semi-departmentalized schools had a mean scale score of 2026.52; whereas, the departmentalized schools had a mean scale score of 2041.22. The results of a *t* test indicated that, although departmentalized schools had a higher mean scale score, the difference was not statistically significant ($p = .337$). Due to this lack of statistical significance, Garcia supported further research on organizational structures. The data from Garcia's study is of note to the current study because many principals use different versions of departmentalization and some principals use a mixture of both departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level, which could have varying influences on the level of student achievement in their schools.

An action research study by DeViscio and Muffs (2007) examined the combination of departmentalization and looping at the same time to see if this method would increase student achievement. The process of looping "involves a teacher moving with his or her students after one year to the next grade level, then looping back to work with a new group of students at the lower grade level after the second year" (DeViscio & Muffs, p. 1). Their research involved a school that only had one teacher per grade level in third, fourth, and fifth grades. Each of the three teachers became a specialist in one subject area, which allowed them to loop with the students and continue to teach that one subject. All of the teachers taught language arts and they each specialized in math, social studies, or science. The teachers felt there was more continuity in instruction and increased instructional time. The scores from the fourth grade state test and the ITBS assessments increased for the students involved in the program for two years. Since the data compared three different groups of students, there were limitations to the

conclusions of the success of departmentalization and looping in this study. In addition, the researchers did not conduct significance testing between the groups; they relied on looking at changes in real test score for signs of improvement. If another school is interested in this model, the researchers suggested for the school to initiate a pilot program with a limited number of participants. Not only did this study address the issue of organizational structure, it also examined the practice of looping with departmentalization to see how it influenced student achievement. Future studies should examine how a variety of organizational structures and looping may influence student achievement. The findings of DelViscio and Muffs have a connection to the current study because it addressed the idea of subject specialists, which is typically considered a strength of departmentalization and a weakness of self-contained classrooms.

The debate on which organizational structure is more effective in generating higher levels of student achievement is much more evident today because of the federal government's involvement in K-12 education (Dropsey, 2004). Dropsey suggested, "The underlying reason for departmentalization in many schools is the demand to meet standards, indicators, and benchmarks of the curriculum" (p. 4). Over the past few years, many studies examined departmentalized and self-contained classrooms to see which type of organizational structure positively affected student achievement (DelViscio & Muffs, 2007; Garcia, 2007; Harris, 1996; Moore, 2009; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011). The results from the studies are mixed, but some data indicated that departmentalization resulted in a higher level of student achievement while self-contained classrooms resulted in more positive teacher/student relationships (McPartland, 1987). In addition, Harris (1996) discovered that students in self-contained classrooms had higher

achievement scores in reading; whereas Yearwood's (2011) data supported the use of departmentalization with higher reading scores. All three studies, Moore (2009), Williams (2009), and Yearwood, discovered that departmentalization positively influenced student achievement in the area of math.

Ediger (1994) and Harris (1996) both recommend elementary schools slowly transition to departmentalization if they decide to change to this type of organizational structure. Ediger (1994) suggested elementary schools presently using the self-contained organizational structure should continue that model in the lower grades, while having teams of two teachers in the next grade level and ending with true departmentalization in the final grade level. This structure allowed students to gradually transition from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization. If schools intended to make the transition from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization, data suggested schools should expect a decrease in student achievement in the transitional year (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). Some of the principals I interviewed for the current study transitioned from one organizational structure to another and a few of them used a combination of both organizational structures for the 2011-2012 school year. The interviews provided more insight into the process of transitioning to new organizational structures at the elementary level.

Perceptions of Departmentalization and Self-Contained Classrooms

According to Dewey (1938), there are three fundamental aspects of curriculum and education: (1) the development of intelligence, (2) the development of socially useful skills, and (3) the healthy growth of the individual. Do parents, students, and teachers/staff feel that departmentalization or self-contained classrooms best serve the

academic, social, and emotional needs of the students at the elementary level? What aspect(s) of education are most important to the stakeholders involved in education? A number of studies addressed the perceptions of staff/teachers, parents, and students in regard to the organizational structure used at their respective elementary schools (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Parker, 2009; Reed, 2002; Roberts, 2008; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011). Although many studies examined these various groups, surprisingly, there is little research on principals' perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary level.

Central Office Staff's Perceptions. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) (1965) conducted a study to determine central office staff perceptions of departmentalization and how many elementary schools used this organizational structure. AASA defined departmentalization as, "students having more than one teacher for their academic subjects---English, social studies, mathematics, and science" (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], p. 2). AASA sent questionnaires to school systems across the nation and 400 central office staff members responded to the questionnaire with 97 reporting that they used departmentalization at their elementary schools. Most of the 97 school systems had departmentalization in the intermediate grades (third, fourth, and fifth grades) of elementary schools. The questionnaire had four closed-ended questions and one open-ended question that allowed the school system to give comments or opinions. In response to the open-ended prompt, a representative from the Mount Diablo School District in California wrote, "All departmentalization is not necessarily good or bad...preserve the positive elements of the self-contained classroom while recognizing the need in some instances, for

modifications” (p. 15). In addition, a central office staff member in Denver, Colorado, stated, “Self-contained classrooms provide flexibility, in the time allotment in skill and subject area and provide a feeling of security in the form of more intimate pupil-teacher relationships” (p. 16). The open-ended question provided insight to central office staff members’ perceptions of the organizational structure mostly used in the system. The AASA study has a connection to the current study because my current central office staff seeks insight into principals’ perceptions of the organizational structures they used in their respective schools. In addition, the current study uses a qualitative approach that mirrors aspects of the open-ended question from AASA.

Teachers, Parents, and Students’ Perceptions. In a study based at Marlatt Elementary School in Manhattan, Kansas, Brogan (1970) examined teachers and students’ perceptions of departmentalization. All fifth and sixth graders answered an open-ended questionnaire on the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization. The questionnaire asked, “Do you prefer having more than one teacher?” “Do you feel your subjects would be more interesting with just one teacher teaching all subjects?” along with several additional questions (pp. 19-20). There was an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire, which allowed the students to add any additional information not asked on the questionnaire. Brogan asked teachers to complete a questionnaire with a question that asked, “Does teaching fewer subjects allow you to have a better knowledge of your subject matter?” (p. 28). The teachers were also able to answer an open-ended question at the conclusion of the questionnaire, which allowed them to add any additional information they believed important. One teacher stated, “The problem with this type of teaching arrangement is the time factor. If the project

needs more time, it may have to be put off until the next day” (p. 32). Another teacher stated, “I would hate to think of teaching again in a self-contained classroom. This is a far superior method of teaching” (p. 32). Results indicated disadvantages of departmentalization including a need for integration of subject matter, the daily schedule sometimes interfered with room activities, and there was a lack of balance in the amount of homework. Advantages of departmentalization included enthusiasm for the program, an interest and desire for learning, more time for subject preparation, no evidence of poor emotional or social adjustment, and teachers were free to experiment with a wide variety of teaching methods. Based on data from the questionnaire, the researcher concluded that there are many advantages and disadvantages to departmentalization at the elementary school level. Though this study is dated, it provided both students’ and teachers’ perceptions of departmentalization and the results indicated advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization. The date of this study suggests the need for contemporary research on the perspectives of parents and teachers in twenty-first century schools.

In a more recent study, Reed (2002) examined a four-teacher instructional model (departmentalization) at the fourth grade level from the perspectives of the parents, teachers, and students at Colin L. Powell Elementary School in the Conroe Independent School District in The Woodlands, Texas. The school, located in a high-income community, served kindergarten through fourth grade with a yearly average population of 758 students. The sample included all 159 fourth grade students, their parents, and the four teachers at the grade level who showed interest in the four-teacher instructional model.

Reed (2002) developed three different questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale for the parents, teachers, and students. She based the teacher and parent questionnaires on the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) Parent Opinion Inventory and the Teacher Opinion Inventory. The student questionnaire came from her conversations with teachers and parents on the four-teacher instructional model. Analysis of descriptive data included averages, standard deviations, and percentages of scores, while qualitative findings documented direct quotes from the participants. She used the qualitative findings in an effort to corroborate her quantitative findings. For example, the Teacher Opinion Inventory indicated 68 to 70 percent of parents believed their children were not successfully managing their materials for four classrooms and parents stated this belief again as a direct quote in the qualitative portion of the study.

Additionally, findings indicated that parents felt their children struggled with refocusing after switching classes, and complained about the accessibility of teachers for conferencing in this organizational structure. On a positive note, parents also felt students could successfully interact with four teachers, children had success with this model, and that teachers provided children sufficient time to complete assignments. Students felt they lost class time due to switching classrooms for different subject areas and found managing materials for four classes difficult. Results from the questionnaire indicated that teachers believed students benefited from specialized instruction, classroom time should be more efficient, organization for the students and parent communication needed improving, and teachers should have consistency for discipline issues.

Data from the above study revealed parents, students, and teachers all strongly agreed on a number of issues including students need help managing materials for four classrooms, students are successful academically in this model, and students are successful interacting with four different teachers. Reed (2002) suggested future research should examine the effectiveness of each organizational structure on student achievement. The results from this study were noteworthy because parents, students, and teachers had both positive and negative perceptions towards departmentalization with the teachers being the most positive towards this organizational structure. Teachers felt they had clear and effective communication on their team and provided students educational programs that were appropriate for their learning needs. Reed examined this issue from three different perspectives, but her study lacked the principal's perspective even though that individual makes the final decision on the organizational structure of his or her elementary school. When there are many conflicting perceptions regarding the organizational structure, whose perception should the principal listen to when making this decision? The purpose of the current study was to determine what factors play into principals' decisions when confronted with differing viewpoints, which is a contribution to the existing literature on perceptions of organizational structure at the elementary school level.

Williams' (2009) study examined both mathematics student achievement, previously discussed in the student achievement section, and teachers' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the fifth grade level. The research question regarding teachers' perceptions of organizational structures stated, "Which organizational structure do fifth grade teachers prefer for the instruction of fifth-grade

students?” (p. 55). Williams sent the Data Collection and Opinions (DCO) for Teachers survey to 240 fifth grade teachers with the goal of addressing teachers’ experiences, perceptions, and opinions concerning the organizational structure at the fifth grade level. The DCO for Teachers included questions such as, “Do you believe teachers who have specialized training in a specific subject area can better serve students through some type of departmentalization at the fifth grade?” and “What is your preference for the classroom organizational structure for fifth grade students?” (pp. 84; 87). The DCO for Teachers indicated that 75.6% of teachers preferred the departmentalized organizational structure for fifth grade students. Williams recommended future studies addressing the correlation between organizational structure and student achievement. In conclusion, the teachers in both Williams’ and Reed’s (2002) study had a positive perception towards departmentalization.

With the goal of meeting the needs of the whole child, Parker (2005) examined students’ perceptions of organizational structures meeting their needs when transitioning from elementary to middle school. The participants in this study came from Howard Elementary School and Sixth Street Elementary School before transitioning to Windsor Middle School, which are all located in a southeastern state. Organized in a self-contained organizational structure, there were 57 students in the sample from Sixth Street Elementary School. In addition, there were 68 students in the sample from Howard Elementary School and all the fifth grade teachers departmentalized. Parker used the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale and the Modified Classroom Climate Instrument to collect data on students’ perceptions. Participants rated themselves using a five-point Likert scale. Additionally, Parker used a repeated measures analysis of

variance (ANOVA) design to collect data at the end of the students' fifth grade year and at the beginning of their sixth grade year. She used the repeated measures ANOVA to identify significant between-group differences for students in the fifth grade data point and the sixth grade data point. The data indicated students' self-concept and perceptions of classroom climate did not vary prior to or after the transition to middle school based on the type of organizational structure their elementary school implemented in fifth grade. Parker believed the middle school concept, teams of teachers and advisory committees, helped all students with the transition from elementary school to middle school. Findings from this study indicated the organizational structure of an elementary school did not affect the students' success in middle school. Parker's study was of particular note to the current study because it examined students' perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary school level and its possible impact of a successful transition to middle school. Parker believed this was true because of the middle school concept and their support for the students.

In another study based on students' perceptions, Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa (2008) examined the impact of departmentalization on elementary school students. They chose a causal-comparative research design to explore if children in a departmentalized elementary school classroom differed from students in self-contained classrooms in relation to their connectivity to school. The researchers had five scales of connectivity in their study including student autonomy and influence in the classroom, classroom supportiveness, liking of school, trust and respect for teachers, and concern for others. Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa used Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) procedures to determine whether the groups differed on more than one dependent

variable (the five student connectivity scales). A total of 1,802 students in third, fourth, and fifth grades answered a survey. The findings from this study suggested a significant difference with classroom support, trust, and respect in departmentalization at the elementary school level. Students who were departmentalized rated classroom supportiveness significantly lower than students who were self-contained. Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa's study is pertinent to the current study because it examined many of the important characteristics of meeting the needs of the whole child, and it supported the use of self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level.

All of the above studies examined the perceptions of central office staff members, teachers, parents, and/or students on organizational structures at the elementary level (AASA, 1965; Brogan, 1970; Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Parker, 2005; Parker, 2009; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009). Reed (2002) and Williams (2009) discovered that teachers' perception of departmentalization was positive; whereas, Reed also found that parents and students questioned many different aspects of departmentalization at the elementary level.

Principals' Perceptions. Andrews' (2006) and Yearwood's (2011) studies used the principals of elementary schools to gather data but in very different ways. Yearwood had principals answer a survey to identify the organizational structures used in their respective schools; whereas, Andrews conducted a study that included a principal's perception of organizational structures at the elementary level. Yearwood examined the effects of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms on fifth graders' math and reading achievement. She created a survey and emailed it to 36 administrators of elementary schools in the Pioneer RESA district. Yearwood asked administrators to

answer questions about the organizational structure used in their building. Some of the questions included school name, organizational structure used in fifth grade classrooms, and organizational structure used in third grade classrooms. The results of the survey identified the schools that had self-contained classrooms and the schools that employed departmentalized.

Andrews (2006) conducted a study that included a principal's perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary level. The purpose of her study was to determine if student performance in mathematics improved through departmentalization of the fifth grade team. Andrews used a rubric to collect data on teachers' perceptions of self-contained classrooms before switching to departmentalization, and she used the same rubric to collect their perceptions of departmentalization after using that organizational structure. The rubric focused on a number of descriptors including time for lesson planning, time for assessment of student work, quality of lessons planned, and general feelings about the schedule. Each descriptor had a four-point scale for the teachers to use with a four representing the most positive response and one the most negative. The data indicated that teachers preferred the new schedule because they had more time for lesson planning and assessment of student work, and felt that the quality of their lessons improved with departmentalization. Andrews also interviewed the principal of the school to discover her perceptions of departmentalization at the fifth grade level. The principal permitted the model, but she had reservations. She felt this model was highly effective for this team of teachers because of their strengths. The principal shared that in the past she both supported and opposed departmentalization at the elementary level. The principal based her decision on teachers' strengths when deciding on the organizational

structure for her school. She felt that departmentalization did not suit some teachers. Andrews' study was of significance to the current study because the researcher interviewed a principal and discovered the meaning behind the principal's decision of organizational structure at the elementary level. The current study expanded on the findings from Andrews (2006) by interviewing six principals and having an extensive qualitative analysis of the data resulting in six major themes principals should consider before making a decision on an organizational structure at the elementary school level. In addition, the current study used qualitative methods to provide meaning to organizational structures at the elementary school level, which provided six principals an avenue to share what they felt was important in relation to organizational structures.

Summary

Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies addressed the theories and concepts that informed research for the current study concerning departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. The Hierarchy of Needs Theory is important to the current study because each organizational structure addresses deficiency and growth needs differently, which shows how principals' decision of organizational structure at the elementary school may affect meeting student's needs. Can one teacher help each child reach his or her full academic potential in all subject areas? Are students able to have their social and emotional needs met when switching classes and having to develop relationships with many teachers? Although Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory addresses the academic, social, and emotional needs of students, schools may benefit from more research on which organizational structure best meets all of these needs at the elementary level.

Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies influences the way teachers teach curriculum in schools and what knowledge students gain from their instruction (Ellis; 2004; Schiro). Georgia elementary teachers generally follow the social efficiency ideology because the GPS and the CCSS drive the curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Even though standards drive curriculum, teachers have their own curriculum beliefs and the organizational structure of a school may influence these beliefs (Schiro). Departmentalization encourages a scholar academic ideology where the teacher believes in students having a broad knowledge of all of the core subject areas; whereas, self-contained classrooms encourage a learner centered ideology where the teacher believes students should have the opportunity to explore their interests (Ellis, 2004). The learner centered ideology has the goal of self-actualization, which is the highest growth need on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Ellis, 2004). Schiro's concept of curriculum ideologies influences principals' perception of organizational structures at the elementary level because they determine if a school is learner centered and focused on children or subject centered and focused on content mastery. Which organizational structure best blends both of these ideologies so schools meet the needs of the whole child (Ellis, 2004; Liew & McTigue, 2010; McPartland, 1987; Schiro, 2008)?

Chapter 2 expanded on the introduction in Chapter 1 by providing an in-depth review of literature on this topic with specific focus on the following areas: (1) Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, (2) Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, (3) meeting the social/emotional needs of the students, (4) having high levels of student achievement, and (5) the perceptions of the different stakeholders involved with the organizational structures. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed description of the

methodology through a discussion of the research design, sample selection, descriptions of the schools selected for the current study, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, a researcher's statement, and a summary. Chapter 4 will describe the results of individual principal interviews, which resulted in six major findings based on the research question. Additionally, documents with each school's master schedules will provide supportive data to the study by showing how schools departmentalized and when the transitions took place. Chapter 5 will discuss the six major findings within the context of prior studies and the conceptual frameworks for the current study, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Finally, the chapter will cover limitations, future research, and a conclusion.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study before explaining the selected methodology and research design. While the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) Act increased the accountability of school administrators in assisting all students to meet or exceed grade level standards, principals must balance this academic expectation with the importance of meeting students' social and emotional needs (Liew & McTigue, 2010). Principals' decisions on organizational structure at the elementary level may influence how schools meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. Previous studies addressed different aspects of the perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Liu, 2011, Reed, 2009; Williams, 2009). Andrews (2006) examined this topic from a principal's perspective and discovered that the principal approved departmentalization for her school because of the teachers assigned to the grade level and that her support of departmentalization at the elementary level depends on the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers. The current study adds to the literature by inductively generating themes based on interviews with six principals and a document analysis of the master schedule from each school. The purpose of this study was to provide meaning to principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. One overarching research question guided the current basic

interpretive qualitative study, “*What are principals’ perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level?*” This chapter will cover the research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, researcher’s statement, summary and organization of the study.

Research Design

I chose a basic interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam, 2002) for this study in an attempt to make meaning of principals’ perceptions of organizational structure at the elementary level, which I collected in the principals’ natural setting. According to Creswell (2009), the natural setting allows researchers to collect data at the site where participants experience the issue of interest. Researchers conducting a basic interpretive qualitative study are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how people construct their worlds, and what meaning people give to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In a basic interpretive qualitative study, researchers typically draw upon concepts, models, and theories from different branches of sociology or psychology to frame a study (Merriam, 2002). The constructivist paradigm supports the notion that reality is socially constructed and that the purpose of research is to reflect understanding in a particular context (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2002; Paul, 2005; Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007). This paradigm also rejects the “possibility of a value-free, objective human science” (Paul, 2005, p. 63).

A basic interpretive qualitative design facilitates my ability to participate in an inductive process of collecting data, being the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and to end with a richly descriptive account of the reasons behind principals’ decisions on departmentalization or self-contained classrooms at the elementary level

(Merriam, 2009). By using this research design, I am able to make meaning of participants' reality with the goal of practicing administrators applying that contextual knowledge to their respective schools. "Each qualitative study is context-specific and your data are unique, as are you and your creative abilities to code them" (Saldana, 2009, p. 30).

The basic interpretive qualitative research design stems from a constructivist research paradigm, which promotes the researcher and participant constructing meaning together (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Based on the constructivist paradigm, there are multiple realities and interpretations of organizational structures at the elementary level, and my goal is to seek understanding of the principals' world in which they work (Creswell, 2009). I employed this design to understand the meaning of organizational structures for the principals involved with making the decision. "Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). In summary, this type of qualitative research best supported my study because it allowed me to interpret the principals' experiences with organizational structures, understand how they construct their worlds in relation to this topic of interest, and discover the meaning the principals attribute to their own experiences with the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

Sample Selection

I employed a purposeful sampling technique for this study because I could select information-rich cases, which provided an in-depth understanding of the meaning behind the organizational structures that principals used at their elementary schools (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling, "is based on the assumption that the

investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). More specifically, I chose principals along a continuum from those that have only self-contained classrooms, to principals that departmentalize in the intermediate grades of third-fifth, to principals that have a combination of both organizational types within the same grade levels in the intermediate grades. According to Patton (2002), any common patterns or themes that emerge from variation are valuable to the phenomenon, and my purposeful sampling involves schools along a continuum of organizational structures.

I used the results of a survey that my Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning sent to all principals within the previous year to identify the principals that preferred each type of organizational structure. This closed-ended survey, the Elementary Principals Class Model Survey (Dewey County Board of Education, 2011), asked six questions about organizational structures so the Assistant Superintendent could understand what model each principal used in his or her school. Principals reported using self-contained classrooms; team teaching, which is a modified version of departmentalization with two teachers working together; or departmentalization. They identified the organizational structure used at each grade level in their school during the previous academic year. Administrators also identified the number of minutes spent on math, language arts, science, and social studies per day. This survey provided the data I needed to select my purposeful sample for this study. Since I am an administrator in the same county, I also had knowledge of the organizational structures each school used, how willing each principal was to participate in my study, and how interested principals were in the topic of organizational structure at the elementary level.

My sample size for this study included six participants with two principals employing departmentalization in third, fourth, and fifth grades; two principals utilizing self-contained classes in all three grade levels; and two principals implementing a combination of these two organizational structures among various classrooms and grade levels. Due to the diversity of organizational structures represented in this sample, data collection and analysis yielded detailed descriptions of each case that cut across the continuum of organizational structures at the elementary level. Patton (2002) believes that high quality, detailed descriptions of individuals' experiences and shared or different patterns that cut across all of the cases are important findings for qualitative inquiry. I decided on a purposeful sample size of six participants due to data saturation. According to Seidman (2006), researchers achieve data saturation at the point in a study when the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported and is no longer learning anything new concerning the phenomenon of interest.

In order to ensure confidentiality in this study, I used pseudonyms for the county name, school names, and principal names. The schools chosen for this study reside in the Dewey County School System in Central Georgia. The schools in this system vary in age but not in cleanliness, safety, or expectations for the academic achievement of the students. The Dewey County School System prides itself on giving the same quality of education to all students despite the location of the school. The county's vision is to have a world-class system, and the mission is producing high achieving students (Dewey County Board of Education, 2011). The Dewey County School System defines a world-class school system as preparing graduates to compete against students from across the globe. There were 139,900 people living in Dewey County in 2010 with a growth rate of

26.3% since the year 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). As of 2010, the racial/ethnic make-up of the county's population was 63.3% white, 28.6% black, 6.1% Hispanic, and 2.4% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Eighty-eight percent of all people are high school graduates and 25.1% of people have a Bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). There are twenty-three elementary schools in Dewey County with three of the schools designated as primary schools and serving pre-kindergarten through second grades (Dewey County Board of Education, 2011). I will share a brief narrative of each of the six schools/principals making up the sample for this study. By understanding the context of the schools and their principals, the reader is better able to judge the ultimate transferability of findings to his or her own setting (Patton, 2002).

Mount Zion Elementary School. Dr. David Alexander, principal of Mount Zion Elementary School for the past five years, lives by the mission statement, "to provide a learning community that assists the whole child in meeting his or her highest potential" (Dewey County School System, 2011, p. 3). Mount Zion received the School of Excellence Award for the 2010-2011 school year for outstanding test scores and has the vision of reaching the platinum status award for high academic achievement. To receive platinum status in the State of Georgia, a school must meet AYP for three consecutive years with a minimum of thirty-five percent of students exceeding standards and ninety-eight percent of students meeting or exceeding on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) (Georgia Department of education, 2011). Built in the year 2007, the school has approximately 54% Caucasian students, 23% African American students, 11% Hispanic students, and 12% in other categories with a free and reduced rate of 28% (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The Lions' theme for the current school year

was to “Ride the Wave to Success.” The school presently departmentalizes in third, fourth, and fifth grades.

Hidden Valley Elementary School. Hidden Valley Elementary School’s principal of nine years, Dr. Savannah Hill, earned the award for Title I Distinguished School between the years of 2002-2011 and the National Blue Ribbon School award for the 2011 school year. The school is “committed to providing a positive, safe, respectful, academically rich environment in which staff, students, parents, and the community collaborate to prepare students to meet the challenges of a culturally diverse, technological world” (Dewey County School System, 2011, p. 3). The Mustangs state, “Practice like we play...everyday” while celebrating their many accomplishments (Dewey County School System, 2011). Built in 1964, the school has approximately 47% Caucasian students, 38% African American students, 7% Hispanic and 8% in other categories with a free and reduced rate of 68% (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The school presently has self-contained classrooms in third grade and departmentalizes in fourth and fifth grades.

Skyway Road Elementary School. Dr. Jennifer Howard, principal of Skyway Road Elementary School for the past thirteen years, staff members, and students live by the mission to “develop LEADERS one child at a time” with the letters in LEADERS standing for Loyalty, Excellence, Achievement, Discipline, Enthusiasm, Responsibility, and Success (Dewey County School System, 2011, p. 3). The school earned the Title I Distinguished School Award for ten consecutive school years and became the nineteenth recognized *Leader in Me* school during the 2011-2012 school year. A *Leader in Me* school follows tenants from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey,

which uses character education to decrease discipline referrals and increase academic achievement to prepare students for the twenty-first century (Covey, 2008). Built in 1965, the school has approximately 47% Caucasian students, 41% African American students, 4% Hispanic students, and 8% in other categories with a free and reduced rate of 71% (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The Tigers' theme for this school year is, "It's great to be a Skyway Tiger" and "Finding the leader in you" (Dewey County School System, 2011). The school presently has self-contained classrooms in third grade and departmentalizes in fourth and fifth grades.

Eastside Elementary School. The assistant principal at Eastside Elementary School, Mrs. Rachel Thomas, became principal two years ago with the mission of helping, "all students meet or exceed all academic standards" (Dewey County School System, 2011, p. 3). The school was designated a Title I Distinguished School for the past seven years and follows the motto of "Putting Children First" (Dewey County School System, 2011). Built in 1968, the school has approximately 61% Caucasian students, 26% African American students, 9% Hispanic students, and 4% in other categories with a free and reduced rate of 70% (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The Mustangs have a can-do attitude and a long-standing tradition of success with the goal of maintaining a close relationship with the community. The school presently has self-contained classrooms in third and fifth grades and departmentalizes in fourth grade.

Morris Road Elementary School. Dr. Janet Hightower, principal of Morris Road Elementary School for the past eight years, had the honor of having her school designated as a Title I Distinguished School and a 2010 Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals (GAESP) School Bell winner. The mission statement for the Eagles is "to

encourage, guide, and support all students to reach their highest potential” (Dewey County School System, 2011, p. 3). Built in 1999, the school has approximately 52% Caucasian students, 31% African American students, 7% Hispanic students, and 10% in other categories with a free and reduced rate of 49% (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The school follows the motto of “Let nothing interrupt instruction,” which the principal believes is a recipe for success (Dewey County School System, 2011). The school presently has self-contained classrooms in third, fourth, and fifth grades.

Whitewater Elementary School. Mrs. Rebekah Smith, principal of Whitewater Elementary School for the past four years, follows the vision of helping all students to “achieve their maximum potential, lead productive lives, and become good global citizens” (Dewey County School System, 2011, p. 3). The school won the award for being a Title I Distinguished School while striving to meet their mission of developing respectful, lifelong learners. Built in 1990, the school has approximately 41% Caucasian students, 51% African American students, 4% Hispanic students, and 4% in other categories with a free and reduced rate of 73% (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The school follows the motto of “Building our future one child at a time” (Dewey County School System, 2011). The school presently has self-contained classrooms in third, fourth, and fifth grades.

Data Collection

I used individual interviews as my primary source of data collection so that I could obtain principals’ perspectives on organizational structures and develop an in-depth understanding of the meaning of these perspectives of departmentalization and/or self-

contained classrooms (Seidman, 2006). A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) allowed me “to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). There were some pre-determined questions; however, this type of interview allowed questions to emerge during the course of the interview giving me the flexibility to add new questions and to replace pre-established questions based on the responses of each participant (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). In contrast, structured interview formats have a predetermined wording and order of questions with the goal of taking each participant through the same sequence (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The interview began with a grand tour question, which allowed participants the opportunity to initially discuss what they saw as most important or germane to the topic of interest (Glesne, 2011; Seidman, 2006). The grand tour question asked principals to share their thoughts of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. After the principals responded to the grand tour question, I used the semi-structured interview guide to provide a set of questions to explore with each participant during the interview. These questions reflected on principals’ past experiences with organizational structures and applied the previously discussed conceptual frameworks, Maslow’s (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro’s (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, as a lens for this study. The interview guide also reminded me of relevant questions, topics, subject areas from my experiences, conceptual frameworks, and points from my literature review to address during the interview (Patton, 2002). The principals’ responses to the grand tour question determined how much of the pre-determined questions I used in each interview. I asked some probing questions after listening to the principals’ responses to the grand tour

question and questions based on past experiences and the conceptual frameworks. Probing allowed me to ask for more details, for clarification, or for examples as the interview progressed (Merriam, 2009). I ended the interview by asking a closing question that allowed participants to add any additional information about organizational structures at the elementary level (Patton, 2002). My goal was to let the interview move forward in the direction that the principals took it while keeping the conversation focused on the topic of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level.

I made an audiotape of the interviews to increase the accuracy of data collection, be more attentive to the interviewee, and preserve the data for subsequent analysis (Patton, 2002). I took notes during the interview as these notes helped me ask probing questions, gave me contextual information while transcribing interviews, indicated important quotes from the tape, served as a tool during data analysis, and provided a backup in case the tape recorder malfunctioned (Patton, 2002). By making an audiotape of each interview, I was able to make a transcript, which aided in coding during data analysis. I also observed the interview area and the behaviors of the interviewee, which provided some cues when conducting the data analysis. For example, one participant came to the interview very prepared and listed many reasons for her support of self-contained classrooms following the grand tour question. Additionally, another participant's interview area was very stressful and possibly affected the data collected at that natural site. The six interviews lasted variable lengths of time from forty-five minutes to seventy-five minutes.

I used document analysis as a second data source for this study to help provide context for each participant interview. I asked each principal to provide a copy of his or

her master schedule and demographic information before each scheduled interview. The demographic information form is located in Appendix B. Document is considered “the umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand...they include just about anything in existence prior to the research at hand” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 139-140). Documents are valuable because of the direct data they provide and the stimulus of inquiry pursued through interviews (Patton, 2002). Study documents provided contextual information on each school and additional areas to examine during the interview. A master schedule at the elementary level typically has time slots for core subject areas and special classes such as music and art, times for lunch, and the organizational structure of the grade levels. Each school designs their master schedule differently, and I was interested to see what data was on the master schedule and how it related to the organizational structure of that elementary school. Additionally, the master schedule provided information such as how long students were in each classroom, how many minutes were spent on each subject area, and additional information on departmentalization or self-contained classrooms. Finally, the documents supplemented the interviews by furnishing descriptive information, verifying and distinguishing data from other sources, and advancing new categories of data (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

The data for this study consisted of interview transcripts from principals’ interviews, documents with the master schedules from each of the principal’s schools, and demographic information from the schools and their principals. The process of data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection and interpretation beginning with the

first interview and initial document analysis (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Data analysis is “the process of making sense out of data...consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read...it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176). I used the constant comparative method, which involved constantly comparing data within the interview transcript, one interview transcript with another interview transcript, and across all of the interview transcripts (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). This method helped me discover the similarities and differences among individuals within the purposeful sample chosen for this study.

The process of coding data is heuristic due to the exploratory process that stimulates the researcher to think beyond unit level data. The purpose is to link the data obtained from individuals with larger data with the goal of creating themes (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2009). I used initial coding for the first cycle of the coding process, which is “breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (Saldana, 2009, p. 81). This data splitting permitted an analysis of the data line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence, and paragraph-by-paragraph within the transcripts (Saldana, 2009). A code in qualitative research is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). Merriam (2009) defines coding as assigning some sort of shorthand designation to your data so one can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data. Coded datum is the line, sentence, or paragraph coded, and it represents data that was important to the current study (Saldana, 2009).

I used focused coding for the second phase of the coding process, which “searches for the most frequent or significant initial codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus and requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense” (Saldana, 2009, p. 155). Categories or themes are conceptual elements that cover many different units of data and capture patterns that cut across the data (Merriam, 2009). Focused coding enabled me to compare the newly constructed codes with the data from all of the interviews with the goal of crystallizing participants’ experiences into themes (Saldana, 2009). The conceptual frameworks for this study, Maslow’s (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro’s (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, informed the themes developed during focused coding (Maxwell, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, I presented my findings from the research as themes. This was an inductive process that involved clustering data units together, with the goal of developing salient themes (Merriam, 2009). These themes captured the essence and meaning behind principals’ decision of organizational structures at the elementary level. Data analysis included coded data from the interview transcripts to inductively develop the themes for the study.

I used the conceptual frameworks, Maslow’s (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro’s (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, discussed in Chapter 2 as a lens for data analysis. After stating the grand tour question, principals discussed the importance of meeting the social, emotional, and/or academic needs of the students. This discussion followed Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory where students must have their needs met at one stage before advancing to the next stage (Maslow, 1943, 1971). Some examples of concepts related to the curriculum ideologies discussed by the

principals included the importance of a student being with one teacher all day so teachers could meet his or her needs, which supports the learner centered ideology (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008). Additionally, principals stressed the importance of students having teachers well trained in subject areas, which follows the scholar academic ideology (Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2008). Even though I used these conceptual frameworks as a lens when analyzing the data, I believed that principals would address issues, topics, or theories I had not considered, and I looked forward to understanding their perspective on organizational structures.

During the data collection and analysis process, I wrote reflective commentaries that examined my thoughts and interpretations of the interviews, the coding process, and the emerging themes (Shenton, 2004). These reflective commentaries also provided me with the opportunity to analyze how I personally related to the participants and their ideas about organizational structures, how the data did or did not reflect the conceptual frameworks of the study, and suggested future directions for the interviews and data analysis (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) uses the term *analytic memos* for this type of reflection and meta-analysis of data collection and analysis procedures. I labeled each of the commentaries with the date and a descriptive title to help me with sorting and analyzing the reflective commentaries. A sample of the reflective commentaries is in Appendix C.

The master schedules collected for this study represented data the principals developed when implementing their choice of organizational structure (Creswell, 2009). Not only did the documents provide context on the schools and each principal's decisions on organizational structure, but data analysis of each document resulted in an

understanding of how long students spend with each teacher, the number of minutes students spend in each subject area, and other pertinent information related to departmentalization and self-contained classrooms. The documents provided rich data on the number of transitions and the number of teachers departmentalizing at each grade level. I coded the documents by identifying contextual information or organizational structure data that added pertinent information or the principal's perspective to the study (Merriam, 2009).

The demographic profile (Appendix B) provided background data on the principals and their schools. The profile also enabled me to specifically discover the organizational structure used at the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels of each school participating in the study. The data on each principal's profile provided important contextual information before I interviewed them. For example, I understood how many teachers departmentalized before beginning the interview. I was also able to learn if the principals had any personal experiences with departmentalization from their teaching experiences or their children being in elementary school. In addition, the demographic profile helped me tailor the questions specifically for that participant based on the organizational structure presently used at the principal's school. For example, I asked Dr. Hightower, a school that was fully self-contained, if she ever considered departmentalization for her students since she departmentalized when she taught at the elementary level.

Ethical Considerations

Although the risk to participants was minimal due to the nature of the study focusing on organizational structures of an elementary school, I employed various

safeguards to ensure the protection and rights of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009). The interview and document analysis caused minimal risk for the participants because the questions focused on a logistical topic without clear right and wrong answers. I obtained each participant's voluntary informed consent (Appendix E), fully explained the study to them, and answered any questions the participants had before beginning the interview. Additionally, I used pseudonyms for the county name, school names, and principal names during the study. After collecting and managing the data, I stored the data in a locked filing cabinet in my office during the study. Only my committee members, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and I had access to the data. Also, I assigned each participant a number and kept all identifying information separate from study data in order to keep his or her identity confidential. After transcribing the individual interviews, I deleted the recorded audio interviews. Lastly, I obtained IRB approval for my study from Valdosta State University (see Appendix D).

Trustworthiness

The inductive and contextual nature of qualitative research draws criticism from objectivist researchers who question if the results of this approach are valid and reliable (Shenton, 2004). In contrast to qualitative research, objectivist paradigms consider finding a generalizable truth as the purpose of research and advocates objective data through the use of the scientific method (Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007). Many qualitative researchers address the issue of validity and reliability by discussing the concept of trustworthiness (Glesne, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981) expanded on the idea of trustworthiness by relating his terminology to the positivist terminology: credibility in

preference to internal validity, transferability in preference to external validity/generalizability, dependability in preference to reliability, and confirmability in preference to objectivity. I examine each of these areas of trustworthiness in relation to the current study in the following sections.

Credibility. Credibility deals with how congruent findings are with participants' reality based on the data presented (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). "One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). The current study addressed credibility with well-established research methods (Shenton, 2004). I utilized both a constructivist paradigm and a basic interpretive qualitative research design to frame my study and to guide the collection of individual interviews and document analysis. The constant comparative method allowed me to compare the data within the interview, one interview to another interview, and to compare and contrast all of the interviews (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). For coding purposes, I used initial coding for the first phase, focused coding for the second phase, and reflective commentary during this process (Saldana, 2009; Shenton, 2004).

My study addressed the issue of credibility by employing triangulation through the use of multiple data-collection methods including interviews, document analysis, and demographic information concerning the principals and their schools (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004). The triangulation of data sources means "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times

and by different means within qualitative methods. Checking interviews against program documents ...can corroborate what interview respondents report” (Patton, 2002, p. 559). At minimum, my goal was that the documents consisting of master schedules provided contextual information on the school and each principal I interviewed. In addition to data triangulation, reflective commentary also added to the credibility of this study because I wrote commentary after each interview and during the coding process as themes emerged (Jasper, 2005; Saldana, 2009; Shenton, 2004). The reflective commentary addressed issues such as how I related to the participants and what they shared during the interview, the initial and focused coding of the data, how the data was related to the conceptual frameworks of the study, any problems I had during the study, and future directions for the study (Jasper, 2005; Saldana, 2009).

As I wrote my reflective commentary (Appendix C), I used an analogy of being on a voyage while collecting and analyzing the data for this study. I considered myself the captain/researcher of the voyage with the passionate goal of discovering meaning behind principals’ decisions on organizational structure decisions at the elementary level. I hope that my voyage and time spent collecting and analyzing the data helps other administrators make an informed decision that best meets the needs of his or her school.

Member checks also helped with the credibility of the study by allowing me to receive feedback on my emerging findings from all of the principals I interviewed and collected documents from during the course of the study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2009; Shenton, 2004; Trochim, 2006). Member checking “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do...as well as being an important way of identifying your own

biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). I felt this was a powerful tool to help with the credibility of this study, and I began the member checks as soon as I transcribed the interview. I provided the participants with the typed transcripts and with the final themes with quotes from the interview that supported the theme so the participant could verify the conclusions (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Four of the six participants provided feedback on the documents and sent them back to me to review. Some of the principals confirmed their comments and others made additional insights to their original statements. Due to member checking, follow-up interviews were not necessary for clarification or understanding the meaning of participants’ decision for organizational structure.

Transferability. In qualitative research, transferability is “the extent to which the findings of one study applies to other situations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Patton (2002) uses the term *fittingness* to describe the degree of transferability between two different contexts. I gave detailed contextual information on participants and settings within the study to allow readers to determine transferability of my results and conclusions to their own environment (Jasper, 2005; Shenton, 2004). More specifically, I shared the data collection methods I employed, the number and length of the data collection sessions, and the contextual information about the schools and principals involved in the study.

Dependability. Dependability in qualitative research is very similar to reliability in quantitative research where the researcher shares the techniques used in the study so others can repeat it and achieve similar results (Shenton, 2004). I addressed the issue of dependability by sharing my methods in detail to enable others to repeat the study within their own context and inductively discover the meaning their sample places on

organizational structures at the elementary level. The in-depth coverage of methods also showed readers that I followed rigorous qualitative research practices to display dependability in my results (Jasper, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Merriam (2009) views dependability as not stressing that others obtain the same results as the researcher, but that given the data collected, the results make sense to the reader of the study.

Confirmability. Confirmability relates to the concept of objectivity in quantitative research, and researchers should ensure that findings reflect participants' experiences, ideas, and meaning, rather than the researcher's perception or beliefs on the topic (Shenton, 2004). It requires the researcher to share how he or she reached interpretations and conclusions (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). Peshkin believes that "subjectivity can be seen as virtuous. For its existence underlies a researcher's making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of the writer's personal qualities joined to the data he or she has collected" (1991, p. 287). I believe that my experiences with organizational structures along with my knowledge of the prior research and the conceptual frameworks related to this project can be an asset to the study. I addressed the issue of confirmability and my own subjectivity by sharing thoughts related to my own experience through my researcher's statement in Chapter One and again in this chapter. Additionally, to increase the confirmability of the study, I had the participants read their transcripts and the final themes and respond to both documents. Four of the six participants confirmed comments and added new insights to the transcripts and final themes. According to Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2007), a researcher establishes confirmability when he or she achieves credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Researcher's Statement

My experiences as an assistant principal at the elementary level and my knowledge of previous research in this area gave me the background knowledge I needed to interview, analyze documents, code, and create themes based on the data collected. While reading, researching, and preparing for this part of the dissertation, I read “all coding is a judgment call since we bring our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, and our quirks to the process” (Saldana, 2009, p. 7). I believe my experiences, combined with the data collected in this study, helped me obtain a rich description of the principals' decisions behind the organizational structure that they chose for their school. Since I am a practicing administrator, it helped me relate the data collected from this study to the decision-making process of organizational structures at the elementary level. I also agree with Peshkin (1991) that readers should address their subjectivities and then let them be seen as a virtuous part of the research. My principal and I used departmentalization over the past few years due to the need to make AYP. We made this decision, as we believed students should receive instruction by teachers trained in specific subject areas and passionate about the content. Despite using this organizational structure in the past, we decided to use a mixture of the two organizational structures during the 2011-2012 school year, so we could strategically place students in the one we believed best fits that student. After the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year, we felt satisfied with using both organizational structures within one grade level.

In casual conversations over the previous months, I shared my dissertation topic with other administrators, and I informally asked them what organizational structure they

used and their reasons behind that decision. I received some unique perspectives on this topic, and I looked forward to learning more about the meaning behind principals' decisions in the current study. For example, one principal told me she lets her teachers decide which organizational structure they used at her school, as it did not matter to her what organizational structure she implemented. I found this response to be very intriguing because I care about what my teachers think, but I am going to make the decision I feel is best for the organization as a whole. This conversation with the principal made me even more excited about my topic because I wanted to dig deeper into the meaning behind principals' decisions, and I believed I would discover some important data on this topic. I plan to use data from this study to inform my future decisions on the organizational structure at my school as appropriate. Additionally, I will share the results with my Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning so that he has a better understanding of principals' decisions on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. I also hope others will examine the contextual elements of this study and determine if they can apply the results of the data to their situation or replicate my methods so they can discover their principals' meaning behind organizational structures.

Summary

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. Purposeful sampling allowed me to interview principals that presently use each organizational structure and principals that use a combination of both organizational structures in their respective buildings. I asked principals to provide a

copy of their master schedule for document analysis. Data analysis included the constant comparative method using initial coding for the first phase of analysis and focused coding for the second phase (Saldana, 2009). My goal was to develop themes based on the data that captured the meaning behind principals' decision on organizational structures.

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the methodology through the research design, sample selection, descriptions of the schools selected for the current study, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, a researcher's statement, and a summary. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the principals' interviews, which produced six major findings based on the research question. Additionally, the documents with the master schedules provided supportive data to the study by showing how schools departmentalized and when the transitions took place. Chapter 5 will discuss the six major findings within the context of prior studies and the conceptual frameworks for the current study, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Finally, the chapter will cover limitations, future research, and a conclusion.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative research study was to discover principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level. Principals make this organizational structure decision on a yearly basis and this decision may affect the academic, social, and emotional needs of the students in his or her building. I believed that a better understanding of why the principals in the current study made their decisions would allow myself and other administrators to make more informed decisions for our schools. This chapter presents key findings, obtained from six interviews and document analysis of master schedules for the six schools involved in the study, as inductively generated themes supported by the data.

For the data analysis of the interview transcripts and the documents with the master schedules, I used the constant comparative method, which involved constantly comparing data within each transcript and document and across all of the transcripts and documents. This method helped me find the similarities and differences among individuals within the purposeful sample chosen for this study. Initial coding enabled me to analyze the data sentence-by-sentence and assign codes to specific pieces of data.

According to Saldana (2009), initial coding allows a researcher to break down qualitative data and closely examine it for similarities and differences. I then used focused coding for the second phase of the coding process, which allowed me to search for the most frequent initial codes appearing across the data from all of the interviews. This process resulted in themes that captured the essence and meaning behind principals' decision of organizational structures at the elementary level.

The data from this study resulted in the following six major themes: *what works, transitions, it's all about the people, relationships are the foundation, success with data, and stakeholders' perceptions matter*. Within the major theme of *stakeholders' perceptions matter*, I identified a number of sub-themes including *teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions, and parents' perceptions*. Quotations from the principals' interviews and data from the master schedules informed the analysis of each of the themes and sub-themes with the goal of understanding the principals' perspectives. I hope the reader is able to recognize how passionately each principal believed in his or her decisions and how many variables principals must balance when deciding if self-contained classrooms or departmentalization better meets the needs of the whole child. I generated the themes through my pursuit in answering the overarching research question for this study, "*What are principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level?*"

Findings from the document analyses of master schedules helped me understand if a school departmentalized or had self-contained classrooms. In addition, the documents showed if two, three, or four teachers were on a team in departmentalization. There were more transitions with a greater number of teachers in a departmentalized

setting. I also used the documents to develop a better understanding of transitions at the elementary level. Some of the principals strategically placed transitions when their students went to lunch, recess, or other school activities. Other schedules showed that the transitions with departmentalization reduced instructional minutes for the students. By reviewing the documents before the interviews, I had a better understanding of the number of transitions and when the transitions occurred, which helped with meaning as the principals discussed transitions and the organizational structure he or she felt best met the needs of the students.

I used the demographic information on principals form (Appendix B) to have a better understanding of principals' past experiences in relation to organizational structures. I learned which organizational structure principals experienced when they were a child in school, a teacher at the elementary level, and what organizational structure the participants' children experienced at the elementary level. In addition, the data collected from this form helped me understand which organizational structure principals were currently using at the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels. This background data helped shape the interview questions after principals responded to the grand tour question. For example, Dr. Hightower was departmentalized when she taught at the elementary level, but her school used the self-contained organizational structure. By knowing this, I was able to ask Dr. Hightower about her experiences and why she implemented a different organizational structure from the one she experienced as a teacher.

Dr. Hightower, principal of Morris Road Elementary, was a firm believer in self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. I asked Dr. Hightower if the county moved

her to a school that departmentalized, would she change the organizational structure. She stated,

I would look at some things like are we maximizing instructional time and how are you communicating with parents. I would make sure the relationships are good. These are some things I would make sure were in place other than just test scores.

Dr. Hightower's response was at the heart of many of the themes for this study. The themes presented in this chapter, with quotes from the principals' interviews, may inform the decision-making process of administrators considering self-contained classrooms or departmentalization at the elementary level.

To enhance the credibility of the study, I used member checking during the process of data collection and data analysis. I provided each principal with a copy of his or her transcript and requested feedback on the interview. Three of the six participants read the transcript and provided feedback to the data collected. Following her initial interview, Mrs. Smith shared on her member-checked transcript that her school wasted time on transitions and that time is not an issue any more because her school has all self-contained classrooms. I also sent the principals a copy of my themes with data from the principal that supported the themes and was included in this study. I asked for feedback on the themes and data I sent them. Four of the participants responded to the themes and data collected. Dr. Hightower responded to my document by saying, "That all looks correct." In response to the theme *stakeholders perceptions matter* and the related statement, *As a teacher in a self-contained classroom, I felt that I was always hurrying. I spent more time on subjects I liked*, Dr. Alexander responded, "Yes, I think this would be

true of any teacher.” Member checking helped me diminish the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning behind what the principals shared during the interviews. It also helped me to identify my own assumptions and misunderstandings of participant interviews.

Discussion of Themes

What Works. The first theme, *what works*, embodies a variety of options principals may choose from at the elementary level and the importance of their decision in meeting the needs of the whole child. Traditionally speaking, most elementary schools follow the self-contained model where students spend most of the day in one classroom receiving their instruction in language arts, math, science, and social studies from a single teacher (Dunn, 1952; Yearwood, 2011); however, students typically go to specialists for art, music, and physical education. Self-contained classrooms provide stability and relationships for young children at the elementary level. In support of the self-contained model, Dr. Hightower said, “I feel like these teachers who are self-contained really get to know their kids and really get to build relationships with them and those families...I am a very strong proponent about relationships.” In addition, Dr. Howard, principal of Skyway Road Elementary School who supports both organizational structures stated,

...I still think that young child needs that eight-hour teacher. That class needs so much socialization and there’s so much just getting to know the culture of the school that I think it needs to be done within the confines of one place.

Dr. Howard makes the distinction between younger and older children at the elementary level. A proponent of departmentalization, Dr. Hill, principal of Hidden Valley Elementary School said, “You really have to be tuned in to what works in your building.

Because what works in our building, may not necessarily work in another building.” Dr. Hightower agreed with that thinking by stating, “And so I think you can be successful with both and it has to be what is best for you and your school and your population too.”

Many of the principals interviewed for this study supported departmentalization at the fifth grade level. Dr. Alexander passionately summarized his support for departmentalization by stating,

I believe in departmentalization. I believe it works. I believe the teachers enjoy it...they think it is better for the kids...able to reach the specific needs of each of those children...if you teach a particular subject more often, then obviously you are going to become stronger in the subject.

When I asked about third grade, some of the principals believed students were too young for the departmentalized model. For example, Dr. Alexander, principal of Mount Zion Elementary School, a strong proponent for departmentalization at the intermediate grades (third, fourth, and fifth) for the elementary level said, “I don’t think it is appropriate for them [third grade] to move for every subject....departmentalization is more perfect for the upper grades. Departmentalization is different at the elementary level because we bring in the whole child.” Dr. Alexander felt that teachers at the elementary level still focused on meeting students’ social and emotional needs within the departmentalized setting. The principals interviewed for this study discussed many different types of departmentalization at the elementary level in relation to the unique contexts for their schools.

After completing the initial and focused coding of the interviews and conducting document analyses on the master schedules, I discovered that three of the principals

supported departmentalization where two teachers share a group of students. Mrs. Thomas, principal of Eastside Elementary and a principal that supports both organizational structures, exclaimed,

I would probably never do departmentalization where each subject is taught by a different teacher. Team teaching is a little more appealing because it is less adults that have to communicate about the child to each other and then with the parents....A team would be...like two people working together so the child would just go between those two people. Maybe each of them would teach half of the academics.

Mrs. Thomas's master schedule showed that her fourth grade students on the team of two spent approximately a half day in each classroom receiving instruction in math, science, and social studies from one teacher and language arts from another teacher. The students began the day with their homeroom teacher and then transitioned at 10:55 am each day before they went to recess.

In contrast to the above data, Mrs. Rebekah Smith, principal of Whitewater Elementary, was a strong proponent for self-contained classrooms and cautioned others before trying the teams of two. After trying departmentalization in the past, Mrs. Smith shared the parents' perception of two teachers at the elementary level in context of what works in her particular school,

...departmentalization...a lot of concerns...the parents were having a hard time with that...keeping up with two teachers at that level. And so, being a self-contained classroom, we cut all that out. They [students] still need that one teacher that is just going to take them and hug them.

Dr. Howard supported both organizational structures, but was not very fond of the two-person teams. Her third grade teachers are self-contained, and Dr. Howard's fourth and fifth grade teachers are on teams of four. Dr. Howard commented on two-person teams,

I'm not as big of a fan of a two-member team because it tends to create a divide in the grade level. And if you happen to have two people who are friends, in addition to teammates, and two others that are just professional, it can get a little cliquish.

If a principal decides to try departmentalization in his or her building, a two-person team provides an atmosphere that is similar to traditional elementary schools, but parents may still be confused over their children having more than one teacher, and the teams of teachers may become a clique and not share with the other team. Another option, suggested by some participants, was for principals to consider a three- or four-person team.

Dr. Alexander believed that departmentalization enabled his teachers to be experts in the areas they were teaching. His fifth grade teachers were on teams of three and four. He explained his support of departmentalization at the elementary level,

Why not let them [teachers] be experts in a couple of subjects? Allow them to go more in depth in their planning. This will allow them to differentiate their learning for students, too. I am going to be good in five [subjects], and I'm going to be great in three. I am going to be outstanding, unbelievable in two.

According to Dr. Alexander's master schedule, he had a science/social studies expert that taught those subject areas to four different classrooms in the fifth grade. The students spent approximately one hour in this teacher's classroom. They had a different teacher

for math, and a third teacher for the language arts block. Dr. Howard supported both organizational structures but agreed with Dr. Alexander's thinking about experts at the elementary level and students having three or four different teachers. Dr. Howard stated,

I do think in the elementary level it is stressful to be a field expert in four subjects. That is a lot of responsibility...I actually hired a person who's a dietician and has a second career...your ears perk up when you hear somebody say I got this skill specialized in this area.

The data for the first theme, *what works*, reflects the different types of organizational structures that principals felt were best for their respective schools. Participants in the current study chose a combination of self-contained classrooms, departmentalization with teams of two teachers, and departmentalization with three or four teachers. Ultimately, the principals chose the organizational structure that best fit the needs of their students and worked best within the context of their school.

Transitions. As each participant discussed the most appropriate organizational structure for his or her building, many of the principals stressed the importance of limiting transitions to maximize instructional minutes. Principals' decision on organizational structure determines the number of transitions students encounter on a daily basis. Students have more transitions in departmentalization than they do in self-contained classrooms. Additionally, students switch classes more frequently if a principal decides to have three or four teachers on a team in departmentalization. Dr. Alexander explained in more detail, "...you have to teach them how to transition...and having all of their materials. The teacher will teach their back-to-back subjects and then they swap classes. The two-team...knocked down the transitions in half." Dr. Alexander

stressed the difference in transitions between a third grader and a fifth grader. He stated, “It takes a third grader longer to transition than it does a fifth grader...they are going to forget stuff.” Dr. Alexander also believed that higher achieving students can handle transitions better. He commented, “...our higher achieving students tend to be a little more organized. I think they take the transition a little easier.”

In contrast to Dr. Alexander’s comments above, Dr. Hill, a proponent of departmentalization, did not consider transitions to be a problem in departmentalization with teams of two teachers. She stated, “My teachers...do that [transitions] before they go out to recess so that instructional time is not impacted....My fifth graders are better able to handle transitioning but I would not want it to be between more than two teachers.” Due to lost instructional minutes, Dr. Hill did feel that transitions were a problem when she had teams of three teachers in fifth grade. That is one reason she supports departmentalization with teams of two.

Dr. Hightower was in agreement with Dr. Hill on transitions. She supported self-contained classrooms, but would consider teams of two teachers since there would be fewer transitions and less instructional minutes lost. Dr. Hightower exclaimed, “Yeah, I was very adamant about as few transitions as possible.” Mrs. Smith, principal of a high free and reduced rate school stated, “...when we cut down on those transitions, we took a lot of that behavior out of the situation. Our kids were able to be successful. But with a self-contained classroom, the time wasted has been reduced immensely.” Mrs. Thomas expanded on this idea of transitions by stating, “The transitions in the classroom with one teacher can sometimes be overwhelming for them. You know just the change from

subject to subject. It's a big risk you are taking when you are putting that child in that situation.”

Since five of the six participants discussed the implications of transitions, I examined the master schedules to see if students transitioned more in the schools that departmentalized compared with self-contained classrooms. I also wanted to know if principals strategically placed the transitions when students left their classroom to go to lunch, recess, or other school activities. The two-person teams in Dr. Alexander's fifth grade had an extra transition when they switched to the other teacher. The transition was located after lunch and before they went to Specials (art, music, or physical education). In contrast, Dr. Hill's two-person team transitioned after the students came back from lunch and the restroom, which prevented an additional transition for the students. According to the master schedules, if principals scheduled transitions to occur when students transitioned from lunch, recess, or Specials, then the students would lose fewer instructional minutes. There were more transitions if a school departmentalized in teams of three- or four-person teams. The students in Dr. Alexander's fifth grade transitioned more often because they had a science/social studies expert that taught four different segments.

While discussing the idea of transitions, four of the participants shared their thoughts on students transitioning to middle school. Most principals felt departmentalization in fifth grade would benefit the students when they transitioned to middle school. However, the participants also felt that they should make the decision of organizational structure on the needs of their students at the elementary level. Even though principals must focus on the success of their students at the elementary level,

most care about their success in middle and high school as well. Dr. Hightower shared her mixed feelings on the idea of preparing her students for middle school,

We want to prepare them and help them transition to middle school so I could see that as being an advantage for kids when they move. I am always of the mindset, too, that they are still fifth graders. We don't need to be trying to push them into that middle school mode...we need to do what is best for them. Even if we departmentalized, we wouldn't be making that many transitions. And so, they are going to have to make that adjustment anyways.

Dr. Hightower also shared in the interview that middle school administrators should consider some changes, so there are not as many transitions at that level. In addition, Dr. Hill commented, "...it's a good thing for those who are departmentalized because when they go to middle school, they have already been exposed...to what departmentalization looks like...it's not a real big surprise or shock factor when they go to middle school."

Dr. Howard also saw the benefits of departmentalization helping with the transition to middle school but she stressed, "I do not think the decisions need to be made based on supporting the middle school concept. My thoughts of it are based purely on an elementary....[If it helps with the transition] that is just icing on the cake." Dr. Alexander added to this thinking when he stated, "I learned that also this is elementary and not middle school and we have to remember that...we are dealing with ten-year-old kids."

The participants in the current study do not support basing the decision of organizational structure on the need to prepare students for middle school, but most of them see how departmentalization could make the transition smoother for students. In addition, participants stressed the fact that they were hired to meet the students' needs at the

elementary level and that middle school principals would take care of students' needs at the middle school level. There are many factors to consider when making the decision for organizational structure, but the current study indicated that transitioning to middle school was not an important factor.

It's All About the People. While listening to principals' perceptions on organizational structures, many of them discussed the importance of having the right people in the correct positions. They felt as if the proper organizational structure depended on the staff members in the building. For example, the principals stressed the importance of communication and collaboration if the school departmentalizes. They felt that principals should examine the personalities, teaching styles, strengths, and weaknesses of teachers when deciding who would team with one another. The current theme, *it's all about the people*, differed from the prior theme, *what works*, because it focused on the staff members within the building; whereas, the theme, *what works*, focused on the logistical aspects of the organizational structure implemented at the school.

While discussing the importance of people in the interview, Dr. Hightower shared a personal story of when she taught in a departmentalized setting, "A key to that [teaming]...is that collaboration between the teachers. We shared a common philosophy of education...to do some cross curricula stuff...relationship of working together and thoughts about education." In addition, Dr. Hightower discussed her struggle with organizational structure by stating, "I will fall back to I think every time it is how well they work together, collaborate." Mrs. Thomas also agreed it depended on the people in her building.

I definitely feel like my fifth grade team could do it [departmentalization] because of the group of people that works there. They all have the same values, expectations, run their classrooms very similarly so they would not have a problem sharing their students, and there are only four teachers in the grade also.

Ms. Thomas' response showed the importance of the teachers in the grade level before deciding the organizational structure for the school year. She shared with me that departmentalization would not work in third grade because the teachers were not very similar.

Within the theme of *it's all about the people*, five of the participants stressed the importance of teachers collaborating and communicating if they are going to departmentalize. Both are imperative when principals expect teachers to share the same students, parents, and accountability measures when departmentalizing. When considering departmentalization for her school, Dr. Howard stressed the importance of collaboration. She stated,

Stressors...you have to be able to team and collaborate at a very, very, very high level. You have to think about what is the procedure for the pencils and the pencil sharpening and the notebooks. Who can bring water into the classroom and who can't? It involves a very high level of risk taking and collaboration and openness that perhaps self-contained does not.

In addition, Dr. Hill believed that a departmentalized setting encouraged collaboration. She stated, "Down the line of departmentalization, it gives teachers an opportunity to collaborate...you end up planning for two, three subjects rather than five." Dr.

Hightower's school was self-contained, but she reflected on a time when her school departmentalized in two-person teams. She expressed her feelings,

I really promote the collaboration and all of us pulling together and bringing our best ideas for the best lessons....they almost became like two entities in the grade level. I saw a lot of lack of communication across two smaller groups which bothered me some...I needed them sharing with the person doing writing in the other group. But I did see isolation a little bit more when we split them in two different groups.

In her experience, Dr. Hightower discovered that teachers are more likely to communicate and collaborate in a self-contained setting. She felt that they became isolated or in cliques when they were departmentalized.

When discussing departmentalization and the upcoming Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS), Mrs. Thomas shared concerns about being able to departmentalize because of the integration of the new standards. She stated,

I'm a little bit concerned about it...they can teach science and social studies as if it's a reader' workshop, but it is still going to require a lot of communication with the language arts teachers...and figuring out who's responsible for what or if you are doing these things, than I am doing these things.

Principals at the elementary level do feel it may be more difficult to team with three or four teachers with the new standards, but they feel confident in the two-person team. It will require a greater level of communication and collaboration to departmentalize under the new CCGPS.

Collaboration is also important in the self-contained classroom because each teacher on the team has different strengths and weaknesses, and they should work together across the grade level in lesson planning to help the students achieve academic success in all subject areas. Mrs. Smith shared her feelings on this topic, “They work more collaboratively with their team...they build off each other’s strengths.” After sharing her philosophy on collaboration, Mrs. Smith shared a story about a fourth grade teacher she moved to fifth grade because she considered him a strong teacher and they needed him in that gated grade level. The principal shared with me how the teacher she moved collaborated with another teacher,

His concern was writing, and we gave him as much support as we could give him.

We sent him to training. We gave him his mentor. We also provided her [the mentor] time to come to his class and to see and observe him teaching...he had the highest writing scores.

Mrs. Smith believed in the self-contained classroom and supported her teachers in any way necessary so they would be successful with their students. Yes, it is important to look at teachers’ strengths, but there are also other ways to help teachers grow in their areas of weaknesses.

While participants discussed the idea of organizational structures relating to the staff members in the building, they mentioned the importance of teachers collaborating with parents. The organizational structure decision may affect parent conferences because departmentalization results in more teachers attending the meetings and teachers having more meetings. The participants had contrasting views on this theme. Dr. Hill felt that departmentalization benefited teachers in parent conferences. She stated, “You

have two perspectives on what the students are actually doing in the classroom. Rather than comments coming from just one person...two people comment on the child's behavior as well as the child's academic [sic]." Dr. Howard also agreed that it was helpful to have more than one teacher in parent conferences. She commented, "I really like the diversity that it creates when you sit around the table at a parent conference, and I think more and more as we see parents or families can become very abrupt, very demanding." It gives teachers comfort to sit among their peers during a conference, especially when the parent is volatile. Furthermore, Dr. Howard said, "It is not just one on one saying your child is having problems paying attention. It is three people sharing what's going on...among three teachers, somebody is going to have something really positive to say."

Other principals considered parent conferencing a negative in the departmentalized setting or at least something to seriously consider before moving to that organizational structure. Dr. Alexander exclaimed, "...that class of 28 in fifth grade then becomes 60...all the teachers need to sit on the conferences and that becomes kinda an issue. They will have to attend each other's conferences from their homeroom classes." This is a key point to keep in mind before departmentalizing. Teachers will have more conferences to attend, which will reduce their planning time during the school day. Since Mrs. Thomas' school just switched to departmentalization this school year, she had warned her teachers about parent conferences. She shared her thoughts in the interview, "...we had to know up front that there was not going to be any issues as far as if there is a conference; everybody was going to be there." She had the expectation that both teachers would attend all parent conferences and address any issues as a team.

Dr. Hightower examined this issue from the parents' perspective when her school formerly departmentalized. She shared, "They [parents] had to schedule conferences either with teachers separately or somehow teachers had to try to plan conferences with multiple people in those settings." As students would sometimes do better in certain subjects, Dr. Hightower felt collaboration was harder in that sense. She considered that a disadvantage of departmentalization. Dr. Hightower's school tried departmentalization two different times in the past few years because the teachers requested it, but she said it did not work with the teachers in her building. She said, "I felt like it was such an individual thing. I think it has got to work for those teachers. So we gave them an opportunity to try it." Departmentalization adds additional parent conferences to the teachers, especially in teams of three or four.

The theme, *it's all about the people*, examined the importance of principals knowing the strengths of the staff members before making a decision on organizational structure. More specifically, principals should consider the ability of teachers to communicate and collaborate with other teachers on the grade level before departmentalizing. Self-contained classrooms allowed teachers to work more isolated compared with departmentalization. In addition, departmentalization increased the number of parent conferences, which made the ability to collaborate with parents more important.

Relationships are the Foundation. All of the principals in the interviews stressed the importance of relationships at the elementary level. This finding was consistent regardless of where the principals' perceptions on organizational structures were on the continuum from departmentalization to self-contained classrooms. They all believed

relationships with students were the first step toward high academic achievement. Dr. Hill mentioned relationships throughout her entire interview. She commented, “Relationship building is so important because if kids feel safe, if they feel loved, if they feel they can trust the adults that are working with them, then the academics are going to come....” Additionally, Mrs. Smith shared the importance of relationships by stating, “They [teachers] are going to have to become experts of the students they are serving.” She believed this was easier in a self-contained setting. She added, “...they get to know where those kids are coming from....you still need to instill that love of learning. The teachers are experts of kids and experts of how to help that child be successful and to feel that success.” Mrs. Smith did not feel that teachers should be experts in academic subjects or teaching methods; she believed that teachers should be experts of students. In Dr. Hill’s interview, she stressed the same idea by saying, “For me an expert teacher would be a teacher that looks at the whole child. We can be an expert in our field, and then not be an expert at relationships.” Dr. Hill stressed to her teachers the importance of meeting all of the needs of the whole child. She also stated,

It is just not about them passing a test is [sic] important. And if those kids realize how much you care about them, then they are going to be willing to do the work for you. But I think we have to build relationships first before we can expect kids to follow procedures and policy.

Due to her belief of the importance of student relationships with teachers, Mrs. Smith does not support departmentalization. She shared a story about a teacher that said she would departmentalize if her principal asked her too, but she did not really support it. The teacher explained, “I don’t want to do that because when I’m talking with a parent, I

want the parent to know that I have all their interests at heart...I'm looking at every aspect of their child to see how I can help them.”

Mrs. Thomas' school decided to departmentalize in fourth grade during the past academic year because teachers felt burned-out on the number of papers they had to grade and the amount of preparation for all of the content areas. The principal stressed to the teachers the importance of having a strong relationship with the students. She said, “So, we talked a lot about what would be most important to us and to still follow the belief that we can still have that relationship and still not affect communication in a negative way.”

During the interviews, I asked principals about meeting the needs of the whole child (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2011) and Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Principals stressed the importance of relationships when answering these questions. Principals' perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary level did not change the importance of relationships, but it influenced their responses on these questions. Mrs. Thomas leaned more toward self-contained classrooms and defended it by saying,

I really feel like the greatest predictor of their success is based on that relationship between the students and the teacher...It's easier for the teacher and the child to develop a stronger bond or stronger relationship when it's just between those two people.

Dr. Hill was also passionate about her belief in positive relationships and how self-contained classrooms can better meet the needs of the whole child (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2011). She stated, “...you've got to make

sure that kids know you care about them and that they are not just another number; that they are actual people. For me, the start of it is building relationships with the kids.” Dr. Hill continued her thoughts by saying, “Once you get that rapport with them, and they feel like they can trust you, they will work for you. I think self-contained works for the whole child.” Dr. Hightower stressed the importance of relationships throughout the interview and shared some examples of things her school does to help foster those relationships. “When you can build that relationship with that child and with that family, then can help understand...what some of those basic needs are and you can kinda address those needs...get breakfast...social workers...right clothing...” The free and reduced rates have increased in all of the principals’ schools interviewed for this study. The level of poverty makes the need for having relationships and meeting the social and emotional needs even more important. When asked about Maslow’s theory, Dr. Howard exclaimed, “In fact it is probably the foundation of what I do here as far as establishing a culture of feeling safe and loved. I think some may argue that you have more time to develop that relationship in self-contained [classrooms].”

When asked about Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory, Dr. Alexander considered the needs of students to be different in upper elementary (third to fifth grade) compared with lower elementary (kindergarten to second grade). He said, “...going from self-contained love you [sic]...to letting them grow more academically and challenged. When they are younger, you are going to have more of the emotional needs...when they get older, we are preparing them more for the growth needs.” Dr. Alexander is a principal of an intermediate elementary school (grades third, fourth, and fifth) and felt that by fourth grade, students needed the academic challenge through departmentalization

instead of focusing on relationships with one teacher in a self-contained setting. He also felt it was difficult to have both the strong relationship with one teacher and the academic challenge of several teachers in departmentalization. Dr. Alexander understood the importance of relationships and stressed, "...at the elementary level we still consider them a name and a lot of times a middle school has them as a number...so I think departmentalization works as long as you remember that mentality."

In contrast to Dr. Alexander's school, Mrs. Smith's school had a free and reduced rate of approximately seventy-three percent. As a result, she spent a long time sharing her thoughts in relation to Maslow's (1943, 1971) theory and how she felt that the school was most of her students' safe place. Mrs. Smith shared the story,

They get two meals a day...you can see that a lot of our kids those are the only two meals they get. It is a safe place and when they can connect, they know that their teacher has their back. The key for our at-risk kids...is feeling safe and loved but that feeling of being in a safe environment is a real big key for their academic success. Because if you don't have a safe environment, the instruction and learning is not going to happen. I think those academic needs and physiological needs need to be met but they are met in a safe environment first and foremost.

This story shared some insight to why Mrs. Smith felt that teachers could better meet the needs of their students in the self-contained classroom and the importance of relationships at her school. If Mrs. Smith's teachers do not focus on the relationships with the students and their families, her students do not perform well academically. Mrs.

Smith believed in Maslow's theory and exclaimed, "That...can be a guiding force at our school...because of what we do."

Traditionally speaking, Mrs. Thomas preferred self-contained classrooms, and she provided some concluding thoughts on relationships and one teacher knowing that child well.

I think when kids are younger in elementary school...you are thinking about everything about that child. You have all these things that are not well developed yet about them personally and socially and developmentally and you are trying to teach them the academics and so you have got to meet both of those needs.

The data from the interviews reflected how important relationships were when an administrator made the decision for the organizational structure for his or her building. According to the current study, if a principal feels departmentalization better meets students' academic needs, teachers must still focus on close relationships with the students and meet their social and emotional needs. The data suggests that departmentalization in the form of two or three teacher teams would help in the area of relationships with the students.

Success With Data. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) bill and the need to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) heightened principals' concerns regarding the ability of all students to be pass the statewide-standardized test. The State of Georgia administers the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) each year in the spring to measure students' growth. Even with the flexibility that the federal government recently gave Georgia through the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), student subpopulations meeting AYP is still part of the

accountability measure. I asked principals about the possible relationship of student success with data and the organizational structure of his or her building. Mrs. Smith shared a story about a teacher in her fifth grade and his success with the students.

...when he looks at their scores or their success, he is looking at what he can do for those kids and not just in math...integrating that science and social studies into the reading and the math. He knows what he can do for them.

This story about a fifth grade classroom revealed one strength of the self-contained classroom model. Teachers are able to integrate all academic subjects and remediate based on their needs, which may result in success with data. In contrast, Dr. Alexander shared a story about how his school transitioned from a self-contained organizational structure to a departmentalized setting and had success with data.

We started out with fifth grade and we got our test scores and they went up...the next year we did it in fifth again and some fourth grade...the test scores rise again...even to the point where some third grade classes where I was at in science and social studies were doing it. Departmentalization...we have continued to do that and again we have seen the test scores rise while we have been here. ...it's not good grammar but data don't lie. And it doesn't lie. I know this since we went to departmentalization, our kids have been performing better...the data shows that it is successful with both the higher and lower [achieving students].

The above excerpt highlights the degree to which Dr. Alexander credits departmentalization for generating higher test scores and increased levels of student achievement. He even shared with me that some principals asked him if his test scores would have been as high in self-contained classrooms. Dr. Alexander honestly answered

that he did not know, but that he found success with departmentalization. His school's free and reduced lunch rate this past year was at twenty-eight percent, which is much lower than the other principals I interviewed. With a lower free and reduced lunch rate, Dr. Alexander's school is able to focus on academics and growth needs since students' deficiency needs are met at home.

In contrast to Dr. Alexander's response to student achievement, Mrs. Smith felt that self-contained classrooms were the reason her school was successful academically. She shared her thoughts with me.

Our teachers feel very strongly that that's what allows our students to be successful. And so they want total control and they get to know their kids. They build that relationship with the kid and the parent. We feel very strongly that the self-contained classroom is what allows our kids from the neighborhoods that we serve...it allows them to be successful. We just feel very strongly with our kids with an at-risk child, a self-contained classroom has proven successful for us.

Due to the at-risk population that Mrs. Smith's school served, she felt that the self-contained classroom gave her students the relationship they needed to be successful academically. Mrs. Smith's students benefited from having one teacher all day that focused on meeting their academic, social, and emotional needs.

Mrs. Thomas' school made the transition from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization in the fourth grade this past school year leading her to express some concern about her data. Benchmark tests and reading level assessments showed no change in test scores, but Mrs. Thomas was still waiting on the CRCT results. Mrs. Thomas stated,

I don't know what the [CRCT] data is going to show yet...I wouldn't say that we are any more or any less it is not that much of a difference which is what I was worried about was student achievement. The No Child Left Behind Act puts that forefront in our minds.”

It is too early to determine if the transition in organizational structures affected their test scores in a positive or negative manner. Formative assessments, such as benchmarks and reading level assessments, at Mrs. Thomas' school showed no differences as of this point in the year, but she was anxiously waiting for the CRCT scores (summative assessment) in May of 2012 to determine the success of the change to departmentalization. She does realize there are many other variables besides classroom organizational structure that could affect her test scores. Mrs. Thomas shared that she would study the data closely to determine if she felt the organizational structure change affected test scores.

While discussing departmentalization and student achievement, Dr. Howard emphasized the importance of making sure teachers were not under too much stress in the gated grades of third and fifth. According to the state guidelines in Georgia, third graders must pass the reading CRCT, and fifth graders must pass the reading and math CRCT. Dr. Howard shared her thoughts on this matter in relation to her decision to departmentalize.

It also has to do with where your school is with accountability and what's at stake and what does your data show. It's a lot to ask one teacher to be accountable for the entire math course. I cannot find any data that would show me one [departmentalization or self-contained] is better than the other for producing AYP results as far as with other schools....

Dr. Howard shared that if an administrator chose to have one fifth grade teacher teach four classes of math in the departmentalized setting, that teacher would have the stress of trying to help approximately one-hundred students pass the mathematics CRCT so the students would advance to sixth grade the following year. Dr. Hill also mentioned the importance of AYP and closing the achievement gaps among the different student subpopulations in her building. She shared,

I think what's had the biggest impact on our organizational structure is just making sure that we close gaps. My goal is to make sure that I see some increase where kids start from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. No Child Left Behind has had some impact...I want my subpops [student subpopulations] to do well in school.

When deciding what organizational structure Dr. Hill would use this past year, she had her teachers do a presentation showing the strengths of the organizational structure and how it would benefit students. For Dr. Hill to approve the schedule, the organizational structure must help individual students succeed academically so her school can close the achievement gap.

Furthermore, Dr. Hightower's school used both organizational structures over the past few years. When asked about students' achievement, she said, "We did not see a change in our test scores really. There wasn't any measurable growth or difference between doing one over the other...We were getting the same thing but yet we were seeing some challenges." One challenge that Dr. Hightower discussed was how the test scores had the homeroom teacher's name on the scores even if he or she did not teach their students in one or two academic areas. "But in an elementary school, they [scores]

are going to come back to that homeroom teacher. So for them to truly feel like they have a handle on how their children are doing...I think it helps to be self-contained.”

While discussing student achievement, Mrs. Thomas stressed the importance of teachers being an expert of their methods. “It is not really about the content area for me or the subject area. A great teacher...understands what engages kids, what motivates kids. They understand management.” Mrs. Thomas did not feel it was any easier being an expert of methods in either organizational structure. The methods were the same regardless of whether you taught four different academic subjects in a self-contained classroom or the same subject area four times in a departmentalized setting.

Within the theme of, *success with data*, participants stressed the importance of differentiation and meeting the needs of each student. They did differ on which organizational structure allowed teachers to more easily differentiate and know their kids. Many of the principals commented on this in relation to the organizational structure employed at his or her school.

Differentiation is important because it allows the teachers to meet the needs of individual students by remediating lower achieving students and enriching higher achieving students. The principals had differing opinions on which organizational structure best suited differentiation. Dr. Alexander believed that departmentalization was conducive to differentiation, and he shared a personal story with me.

“Let’s say I am departmentalizing and I am teaching math...I can spread that lesson out and do various activities with varied levels of students in that classroom. I think that if the class wasn’t departmentalized, the teacher would not

have time to do it. I just don't....You are giving that teacher more time to allow them to plan and to meet the needs for each specific class they are teaching.”

Dr. Alexander believed that departmentalization gave teachers the time they needed to plan lessons that met the needs of all of their students and it gave them the expertise to understand the content. “...departmentalized setting...you become so fluid with it by the time you've taught it a few times...you are varying what you are teaching to meet the needs of your learners.” Dr. Howard examined the topic of differentiation from her teachers' perspectives. Her response agreed with Dr. Alexander's belief that it was easier to differentiate in a departmentalized setting.

My staff would say it is easier to differentiate in departmentalization because you can put more depth into your thinking instead of just making sure you have something planned for the day. I think you have more opportunity to try a lesson and so that in itself creates differentiation.

A third principal, Dr. Hill, felt that teachers could differentiate well in both organizational structures. She said, “...differentiation can work in both settings. It is simply because when I think about differentiation that just brings back to making sure we are meeting the needs of individual children.” Dr. Hill continued her discussion by sharing examples of differentiation that teachers can employ in either organizational structure. “...you can work in strategy groups. You can work in guided groups. We believe in teachers conferencing with kids and taking good notes....So I agree with differentiation, but I think it can work in departmentalization or self-contained.”

The other three principals interviewed for this study believed differentiation was much easier in a self-contained setting because of the relationship the teachers formed

with the students and the flexibility in time that teachers had in that setting. Mrs. Smith said, “Yes, because you know the kids...you can differentiate your instruction to meet their needs so you know how they learn best...and your groups are fluid...you can work that in your self-contained classroom.” Dr. Hightower also stressed the relationship factor by stating, “I think to differentiate well, you have to know your kids and relish your kids and I do feel that comes easier when you are focused on your twenty-seven kids...in a self-contained [setting].” She expanded on her thoughts on how a self-contained classroom better meets the needs of the students. “...if there is a child who needs lots of visuals and hands-on, that’s happening in every subject area and not just in one particular area....”

Mrs. Thomas also felt it easier to differentiate in the self-contained model because it provided flexibility with time. “Time would be the biggest constraint [in departmentalization] with differentiating...getting to all of the kids at the different levels...time would be a factor that is affected by doing the team teaching.” Because Mrs. Thomas’ school chose to departmentalize in fourth grade during the 2011-2012 school year, she knew they would need to be creative so they could still meet the needs of the students. She asked her teachers to consider, “How can I communicate that to the other teacher and let her know he still needs to work on this?” Differentiation is one teaching strategy that helps students achieve success with data. The data from the current study indicated that principals differed on which organizational structure they felt best allowed teachers to differentiate instruction. Departmentalization allows teachers to specialize in subject areas, which make differentiation easier due to content knowledge; whereas self-contained classrooms provide teachers additional time to differentiate and to

integrate all subject areas. The current study indicated that the free and reduced lunch rate of schools and the struggle of meeting both deficiency and growth needs affected the decision-making process of the participants and their idea of how to have success with data in their respective schools.

Stakeholders' Perceptions Matter. The sixth and final finding of this study was that *stakeholders' perceptions matter*. Depending on the free and reduced lunch rate of the school and the community support of the school, perceptions of the function of school may vary from place to place; however, principals often listen to their stakeholders to understand the needs of the community. At a higher free and reduced lunch rate school, Mrs. Smith shared a touching story that showed how important the school was to the community.

They don't come to us reading. They don't come to us verbal. And we have to work with them to be able to ask a question instead of grunt...bigger [sic] majority of our kids don't come with...home training...a lot of our at-risk parents depend solely on the school to teach their kids the academics and the social skills.

The stakeholders in Mrs. Smith's school depended on the school to meet social, emotional, and academic needs. Listening to a variety of stakeholders may help schools meet the needs of the community. Sub-themes generated from my conversations with principals on the importance of these various stakeholder perceptions appear below.

Teachers' Perceptions. The participants involved in this study believed they should listen to their teachers when making an organizational structure decision for the school. When asked about teachers' perceptions of organizational structures, Dr.

Alexander shared a story from when he was a teacher and taught self-contained at the second grade level.

Sometimes in a self-contained classroom I felt as if I was always hurrying. I spent more time on math and things I like to teach than things I did not like to teach. I didn't like science and social studies in the lower grades. It was just boring because back then it was so textbook.

After sharing his personal experience, Dr. Alexander examined it from his teachers' perspectives. "...one of the things about departmentalization is that every single teacher in this building has a subject they like to teach more than others...if that is your love and passion, why not let teachers teach that." Dr. Alexander shared his love for teaching mathematics and reinforced his beliefs on departmentalization. "If I could be in a departmentalized classroom and teach math to kids, there is no doubt that I could help them be successful in all varieties of levels of education...to help them and meet the standards." He passionately felt teachers should teach something they love and let them excel at it.

Dr. Howard allowed her teachers to switch to departmentalization because they felt overwhelmed with the paperwork issues and stress level. She admitted, "It's probably just as much for the teachers as it is for the kids because I know they are my direct link to the students." Dr. Howard saw her role as principal as listening to her staff needs and making the best decision based on those needs. She did discover that the two-person team did not significantly reduce the teachers' personal stress load. Dr. Hill's thoughts on teachers' perceptions were very similar to the other principals. She shared,

I want the teachers to do whatever they feel is their strength...I try to listen to my teachers and see what they think is best for them because they are the ones in the trenches every day. And so if something does not work for them, then it is not going to work for the students.

Dr. Hill continued her thoughts on teachers' perceptions, "We pretty much have to listen to what our teachers think are [sic] best. They haven't led us astray in the past. But I think you always have to have your mind open to different experiences." Dr. Hill also stressed that she did not want to be the sole person making decisions about the academics in the building. She felt it was important to listen to her teachers who were in the trenches on a daily basis.

In addition, Dr. Hightower's school implemented both organizational structures over the past few years. She shared with me that her teachers preferred self-contained classrooms because of relationships and the flexibility of time. Dr. Hightower stated,

I do try to listen to them [teachers] because they are the ones in the classrooms with the kids really doing the real work. You know they got to feel comfortable and they need to know professionally that they can help and be a part of making decisions and change.

Dr. Hightower also examined this from her perspective when she taught at the elementary level. Dr. Hightower teamed with another teacher, and they each taught two subject areas. She appreciated the departmentalization because she was new to the grade level and only had to concentrate on two subject areas.

All of the principals I interviewed for this study cared about their teachers' perceptions of organizational structures. Most of them required the teachers to submit a

plan and then the principal gave the final approval. Dr. Howard stated, “I’ve asked them to come back with a presentation and they presented PowerPoint data because I need to know this is not just a whimsical, emotional decision. I make the decision.” Dr. Howard expected to see hard data on how the change in organizational structure would benefit the child.

Students’ Perceptions. In addition to listening to their teachers, a few of the principals commented on their students’ perceptions. It was evident that principals do not take into account the perceptions of students when making a decision on organizational structure at the elementary school level. Dr. Howard shared an amusing story with me about her previous students who are now enrolled in middle school. “The middle school kids are not happy with me that they are getting to team at Skyway Road this year, and they did not get to do it last year. Kids enjoy it.” Dr. Howard then added her thoughts about the fifth graders at her school this year. “So, they love it, but they don’t have anything to compare it to as far [sic] in that grade level.” Dr. Alexander also agreed that his students enjoyed departmentalization. He said, “They like it...they love the opportunity to go to different classrooms and to experience other teachers teaching different ways...they enjoy the transition of learning someone else and their style and the way they teach.”

Mrs. Smith acknowledged that the older elementary students would probably enjoy switching classes.

Some of them that are a little more mature are ready because they are so ready to get out of elementary school...some of our fifth graders are the ones that might would want to change classes just because they would think that was a neat thing

to do. So that's I think...would be their reasoning and that would not be my reasoning.

Although Mrs. Smith believed that her fifth grade students would enjoy it, she did not feel that was a valid reason to departmentalize. She was a firm believer in the relationships that a student forms with one teacher.

Mrs. Thomas shared concerns about her fourth grade students making the transition from a self-contained classroom to a departmentalized setting. She expressed her thoughts about the transition. "The fourth grade students, they have less trouble with it than I thought they would. They seem to have adjusted fine...the teachers that are teamed, they are not exactly alike so each child can relate." In addition, Dr. Hightower examined this question from the student and parent perspective by stating, "My own personal child was here one of the years when we departmentalized and he seemed to like certain teachers better than others...for some children it could be a relief to them if they didn't quite gel with a teacher..." The above findings showed that principals did not listen to their students as much as they did their teachers because students may have an alternative motive for their perception on organizational structure.

Parents' Perceptions. Stakeholders of a school also include parents and what they believe is best for their children. The participants shared their thoughts on parents' perceptions of organizational structure, but parents' feelings did not heavily influence the decision-making process. According to the principals in the current study, the parents had mixed feelings on departmentalization versus self-contained classrooms at the elementary level. Traditionally speaking, most parents were probably in self-contained classrooms when they were in elementary school. The idea of departmentalization at the

elementary level was a new concept to most parents. Mrs. Thomas had concerns about what her parents would think when her school switched from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization in the fourth grade. She shared with me that many of her students' parents attended her school in the self-contained classroom. "I wouldn't say anybody has been...negative nor positive, just curious, just little bit confused."

Dr. Hill found that parents are more confused with the state standards and the new math than they are with the departmentalization. She said, "...for the most part, I think the parents are okay with the departmentalization even if they are aware of it." Because of the collaborative model set-up she had at her school, Dr. Hill's students were used to having several teachers in the room on a daily basis even in the self-contained organizational structure. Interestingly, Dr. Hightower had some parents question her on why she had self-contained classrooms at the fifth grade level. The parents felt that the students would be more successful in middle school if they had departmentalization at the fifth grade level. She told me, "I have had parents...mention...if they [students] had been used to dealing with different teachers of different expectations and things like that." In addition, the parents at Dr. Alexander's school had mixed feelings on departmentalization. He had parents say, "...we love departmentalization, we love moving around to various other classrooms. Our kids love all these teachers." Dr. Alexander also had parents tell him, "...it just doesn't fit my child very well...they are very unorganized...this is not what is best for Johnny...we get along great with Mrs. Smith but we don't get along good [sic] with Mrs. Johnson."

In contrast, principals reported that parents did not have much to say about self-contained classrooms. This fact is probably due to this model being the expected

organizational structure at the elementary level. Some principals mentioned the idea of having two different organizational structures within the same grade level. Dr. Hightower had five teachers on a grade level one year, and one teacher volunteered to be self-contained so the other two teachers could departmentalize in teams of two. "...we felt like we might have some parent concerns about why do they swap classes and this class don't swap classes...our thoughts were just to keep it equitable for everyone...it is more difficult for us scheduling wise." Dr. Howard agreed with this response by saying, "I don't think parents would understand. We thought they may see that as a special education class. Why did my child get this? Why did they not? There were too many cons to it."

In contrast to the above beliefs, Dr. Alexander supported having both organizational structures on the same grade level. He shared a scenario with me, "...you may have a team of fourth grade [teachers] who there is three teachers on that team and two work really well together and the one would rather stay self-contained. If that's what best for them and they want to do it, and they think that is what's best for the kids than I'm okay with that.

The data from the current study indicated that principals did not base their decision of organizational structure on parents' perception. However, if many parents felt passionate towards a certain organizational structure at the elementary school level, principals may then consider the sub-theme, *parents' perceptions*, an important part of the decision-making process.

Many of the principals discussed the importance of the number of homerooms earned per grade level in their decision-making process of departmentalization or self-

contained classrooms. They shared with me that principals must decide if they are willing to have both organizational structures at the same grade level. The data suggested the participants listened to their teachers when making a decision on organizational structures; whereas, the principals acknowledged comments made by students and parents but did not base their decision on students and parents' perceptions of organizational structures.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the six major themes generated from the study based on an examination of the one overarching research question, *What are principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level?* I organized findings by the inductively generated themes based on data from six interviews with principals and document analysis of master schedules for the six schools involved in the study. I included extensive samples of quotations in this chapter from participants to support my themes. By using the principals' language to generate themes, my goal was to help the reader understand the different factors and challenges that principals' decisions on organizational structures bring to their school. After reading and analyzing each of the themes presented in this study, I hope that practicing administrators have a better understanding of the decisions the principals in the current study made and that other administrators may feel more prepared to decide if self-contained classrooms or departmentalization better meets the needs of their students at their elementary school.

Chapter 4 described the results of the principals' interviews, which resulted in six major findings based on the research question. Additionally, the documents with the

master schedules provided supportive data to the study by showing how schools departmentalized and when the transitions took place. The demographic information data provided background knowledge on principals' experiences with the different organizational structures. Chapter 5 will discuss the six major findings within the context of prior research on this topic and the conceptual frameworks for the current study, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Finally, the chapter will close with limitations, future research, and a conclusion.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to understand the meaning behind principals' decision of organizational structures, departmentalization or self-contained classrooms, at the elementary school level and to provide themes to practicing administrators to consider within the context of their elementary school. My study sought to inductively generate themes and answer the one overarching research question, *What are principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level?*

The data collection for the current study consisted of interviews with six principals, a document analysis of each master schedule from the six schools, and an analysis of demographic information collected from the principals to inform the interviews. Data analysis resulted in six major themes that captured the essence and meaning behind principals' decision of organizational structure at the elementary level: *what works, transitions, it's all about the people, relationships are the foundation, success with data, and stakeholders' perceptions matter.*

The goal of this final chapter is to discuss each of the findings in relation to the study's conceptual frameworks, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Theory of Human Motivation and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, and prior studies on departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level.

Additionally, I will end the chapter by highlighting study limitations and directions for future research.

Significant Themes

The significant themes presented in Chapter 4 emerged from principal interviews and document analysis of master schedules for the six schools involved in the study.

Within the six significant themes are three sub-themes: *teachers' perceptions*, *students' perceptions*, and *parents' perceptions*. I will discuss each of the major themes and sub-themes within the context of the conceptual framework and prior studies on this topic.

What works. During the interviews, the theme *what works* was prominent in my discussions with principals because each described the type of organizational structure he or she felt worked for the needs of the children at the elementary level. Furthermore, practicing administrators need knowledge of the different types of organizational structures and how they best meet the needs of the students. This will enable administrators to apply that knowledge within the context of his or her school.

The types of organizational structures most frequently researched include the self-contained classroom, where students have the same teacher for all academic areas including language arts, math, science, and social studies, and the departmentalized classroom, where students have more than one teacher for different academic areas and rotate between two or more teachers for a set period of time (Contreras, 2009; Dropsey, 2004; Gess-Newsome, 1999; Williams, 2009). In support of the self-contained model, Dr. Hightower stated, "I feel like the teachers who are self-contained really get to know their kids and really get to build relationships with them and those families...." In addition, Dr. Howard, who supported both organizational structures, shared, "I still think

that young child need that eight-hour teacher. That class needs so much socialization....” This finding supported Dunn (1952), which examined if there should be a standard elementary school organizational structure that would best meet the needs of the child. Results from Dunn’s study suggested that departmentalization prevented the teacher from knowing the students intimately, promoted compartmental learning instead of whole child learning, and made school a factory rather than a home for children.

In contrast to the above results, Mrs. Thomas and Dr. Alexander felt that departmentalization better met the needs of the child. Departmentalization includes team teaching, which is typically two teachers sharing the same group of students (Contreras, 2009). Mrs. Thomas supported two teachers departmentalizing and shared,

...Team teaching is a little more appealing because it is less adults that have to communicate about the child to each other and then with parents...A team would be...like two people working together so the child would just go between those two people. Maybe each of them would teach half of the academics.

Departmentalization can also consist of three or four teachers working with the same group of students and teaching just one or two major academic subject areas (Dropsey, 2004; Gess-Newsome, 1999). Dr. Alexander believed that departmentalization enabled his teachers to be experts in the areas they were teaching, which would enable them to better meet the needs of the children. His fifth grade teachers were on teams of three and four. Dr. Alexander supported this format by saying,

Why not let them [teachers] be experts in a couple of subjects. Allow them to go more in depth in their planning. This will allow them to differentiate their

learning for students, too. I am going to be good in five [subjects], and I'm going to be great in three. I am going to be outstanding, unbelievable in two.

Although the principals differed in their opinions on which organizational structure better met the needs of the child, examining this topic through the lens of Maslow's (1943, 1971) Theory of Human Motivation brings more clarity to the decision-making process.

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation addresses both the deficiency and growth needs that students have on a daily basis (1943). The four levels of deficiency needs consist of physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs (Maslow, 1943). Schools address some of these needs by providing breakfast, lunch, recess, after school program, climate control, naptime for the youngest students, water fountains, safe classrooms, and established rules and procedures (Brickman, 2005; Huitt, 2007). The four levels of growth needs consist of need to know, aesthetic needs, self-actualization, and transcendence (Maslow, 1971). Once homes or schools meet students' deficiency needs, schools are able to help students know, understand, and explore academic subjects (Huitt, 2007).

Data from the current study suggested that principals concerned with meeting the deficiency needs of students supported self-contained classrooms; whereas, principals in favor of departmentalization worried about meeting the growth needs of the students. Specifically, the conflict appeared to be between relationships (deficiency needs) and academics (growth needs). McPartland's (1987) study examined the effects of self-contained classroom instruction and departmentalization on student-teacher relations and quality of instruction. The results from the survey suggested a positive correlation between teacher-student relationships and self-contained classroom organizational

structures. Additionally, results indicated that departmentalization improved the quality of instruction by having teachers specialize in subject matter (McPartland). Principals must determine if the teachers in their buildings can best meet the academic needs of the students in a self-contained model, or if the teachers can best meet the emotional and social needs of the students in departmentalization.

From a student achievement aspect of *what works*, Williams (2009) examined the effect of traditional (self-contained) and departmentalized instruction on the fifth grade CRCT test. She used a two-sample *t* test to determine significant differences between the two organizational structures. Results from the passing percentages showed a significant difference in favor of the departmentalized setting. Williams' results are congruent with Dr. Alexander's perception of departmentalization. His school slowly transitioned from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization, and he watched the school's test scores increase on a yearly basis. Interestingly, Mrs. Smith felt that self-contained classrooms were one of the reasons her school was successful with the CRCT. This dichotomy in perceptions supports the notion of additional research to understand *what works* in the area of organizational structures at the elementary school level.

I used Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, the conceptual frameworks, as a lens during the data collection and analysis portions of the current study. *What works* exemplifies the challenge of meeting deficiency and growth needs of students through Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Principals with higher free and reduced lunch rates supported self-contained classrooms over departmentalization to fulfill students' deficiency needs. In contrast, principals with lower free and reduced lunch rates

advocated for departmentalization to meet the growth needs of their high-achieving students. Based on the current study, a school's free and reduced lunch rate may affect the needs (deficiency or growth) a principal must focus on when deciding which organizational structure to use at the elementary level.

Transitions. Another important theme that participants stressed throughout the interviews, and one that I examined on the school master schedules, was the idea of transitions. While discussing the different organizational structures each principal used within his or her building, five out of six principals stressed the importance of keeping transitions to a minimum to preserve instructional minutes. Previous studies addressed the issue of transitions and organizational structures at the elementary school level (Harris, 1996; McGrath & Rust, 2002). Harris' (1996) results indicated that the self-contained organizational structure allowed for more instructional time due to a lack of class transition and more time-on-task. In addition, McGrath and Rust (2002) examined the relationship between elementary school classroom organizational structures and transition time between classes. Results from that study indicated transition time was significantly more efficient in the self-contained classrooms with an average transition time of 3.27 minutes compared to the departmentalized school with a transition time of 4.55 minutes. The current study found that principals consider transitions to be an important part of the decision-making process of organizational structures at the elementary school level. A document analysis of the master schedules resulted in schools with self-contained classrooms having the fewest transitions, and schools that departmentalized in teams of three- or four-teacher teams having the most transitions. Departmentalization involving teams of two teachers decreased the number of transitions.

According to the master schedules analyzed in the current study, if principals scheduled transitions to occur when students transitioned from lunch, recess, or Specials, then the principals could keep the students from losing additional instructional minutes. Dr. Hill addressed this by saying, “My teachers...do that [transitions] before they go out to recess so that instructional time is not impacted....My fifth graders are better able to handle transitioning, but I would not want it to be between more than two teachers.” Dr. Hill did feel that transitions were a problem when she had teams of three teachers in fifth grade. In Dr. Hightower’s school, where all classes are self-contained, she exclaimed, “Yeah, I was very adamant about as few transitions as possible.” The current study and prior literature supported the notion of keeping transitions to a minimum to maximize instructional time when choosing an organizational structure for an elementary school. If principals decide to departmentalize, they can place the transitions strategically when students are leaving a classroom for lunch, recess, or break to save instructional minutes. Additionally, the self-contained organizational structure limits the number of transitions and maximizes instructional minutes.

While discussing transitions, four of the six principals discussed the idea of elementary students transitioning to middle school. For the most part, principals felt they should use the organizational structure that best met the needs of fifth graders while not worrying too much about middle school; however, some principals did see how departmentalization could make the transition smoother for students. Dr. Hightower stated,

We want to prepare them and help them transition to middle school so I could see that as being an advantage for kids when they move. I am always of the mindset

too that they are still fifth graders. We don't need to be trying to push them into that middle school mode...we need to do what is best for them.

Dr. Howard agreed to the above statement by saying, "I do not think the decisions need to be made based on supporting the middle school concept. My thoughts of it are based purely on an elementary...[If it helps with the transition] that is just icing on the cake."

With the goal of meeting the needs of the whole child, Parker (2005; 2009) examined students' perceptions of organizational structures meeting their needs when transitioning from elementary to middle school. She used a sample from an elementary school that departmentalized and an elementary school that used the self-contained model. The data indicated that students' self-concept and perceptions of classroom climate did not vary after the transition to middle school based on the type of organizational structure used at the fifth grade level. Parker believed that the middle school concept helped all students with the transition from elementary school to middle school. The results of the current study, in conjunction with Parker (2005, 2009), showed that transitions to middle school was not a major factor in the decision-making process of organizational structures at the elementary level. Participants felt that departmentalization would benefit students as they transitioned to middle school; however, they felt their job was to meet students' needs at the elementary level when deciding an organizational structure for the school.

It's All About the People. The third theme was important to this study because principals stressed the importance of analyzing the personalities, teaching styles, strengths, and weaknesses of teachers when deciding what organizational structure to use at the elementary school level. Dr. Hightower shared with me that she supported both

organizational structures, but the teachers in her current building requested self-contained classrooms, which convinced her to follow that organizational structure.

Within the above theme, collaboration and communication were two important characteristics for teachers in the departmentalized setting. Dr. Howard shared her thoughts on the teacher strength of collaboration:

Stressors...you have to be able to team and collaborate in a very, very, very high level. You have to think about what is the procedure for the pencils and the pencil sharpening and the notebooks....It involves a very high level of risk taking and collaboration and openness that perhaps self-contained does not.

Dr. Hightower's school used the self-contained model, but she reflected on a time when her school departmentalized in two-person teams.

I really promote the collaboration and all of us pulling together and bringing our best ideas for the best lessons....I saw a lot of lack of communication across two smaller groups which bothered me some....But I did see isolation a little bit more when we split them in two different groups.

Dr. Hightower felt that teachers were more likely to communicate and collaborate in a self-contained setting and not be in cliques or become isolated in the departmentalized setting.

Parent conferencing is another important element. If a school departmentalizes, teachers will have more parent conferences to attend and will need to collaborate with other teachers during the parent conference. Dr. Hill felt that departmentalization benefited teachers in parent conferences. She shared, "You have two perspectives on what the students are actually doing in the classroom...Two people comment on the

child's behavior as well as the child's academic." In agreement with Dr. Hill, Dr. Howard stated, "I really like the diversity it creates when you sit around the table at a parent conference. It is not just one on one saying your child is having problems paying attention. It is three people sharing what's going on."

In contrast to the above statements, Dr. Alexander shared that teachers must be willing to sit in on more parent/teacher conferences when departmentalizing. Since Mrs. Thomas' fourth grade recently switched from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization, she made sure teachers understood there would be many more conferences to attend and told them, "...we had to know up front that there was not going to be any issues as far as if there is a conference; everybody was going to be there."

Current literature did not specifically address individual teachers, and their strengths, in relation to organizational structures at the elementary level. The literature focused on student achievement and meeting the social and emotional needs of the students in relation to organizational structure at the elementary level. When examining teachers' perceptions of organizational structures in prior studies (Brogan, 1970; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009), the research did not examine teacher relationships with other teachers. For example, in Brogan's study (1970) teachers were given a questionnaire to complete with questions such as, "Does teaching fewer subjects allow you to have a better knowledge of your subject matter?" In addition, in Reed's study (2002) teachers were given a Teacher Opinion Inventory that addressed issues such as students managing materials and students being successful with different teachers. Finally, in Williams' study (2009) teachers were given a Data Collection and Opinions for Teachers survey that asked questions such as, "What is your preference for the

classroom organizational structure for fifth grade students?” Although each of these studies contributed to our understanding of teachers’ perceptions of organizational structures, the current study provides an insight to teacher characteristics that principals felt were important when considering departmentalization at the elementary school level. Because the literature was very limited on principal perceptions of organizational structures (Andrews, 2006), the finding, *it’s all about the people*, adds a new knowledge base to the decision-making process of organizational structures at the elementary level. More specifically, principals should consider the ability of teachers to collaborate, communicate, and participate in parent conferences when deciding between self-contained classrooms or departmentalization. Despite prior literature being limited in the area of teachers’ strengths, results from the current study strongly suggest that principals should know the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers before making a decision on organizational structure at the elementary level.

Relationships are the Foundation. No matter where principals were on the continuum from departmentalization to self-contained classrooms, they believed that positive relationships were the first step toward high academic achievement. Mrs. Thomas addressed the importance of relationships and why she felt self-contained classrooms were best for students:

I really feel like the greatest predictor of their success is based on that relationship between the students and the teacher....It’s easier for the teacher and the child to develop a stronger relationship when it’s just between those two people.

In her interview, Dr. Hightower shared some examples of what her school does to help foster relationships with students and their families. “When you can build that

relationship with that child and with that family, then can help understand...what some of those basic needs are...get breakfast...social workers...right clothing....”

McPartland (1987) found teacher and student relationships were more positive in self-contained classrooms than in schools that used departmentalization as the organizational structure. Five of the six principals interviewed for the current study would agree with the findings in McPartland’s study. Interestingly, Dr. Alexander considered the needs of upper elementary students to be very different from lower elementary students. He explained his thoughts by saying, “...going from self-contained love you...to letting them grow more academically and challenged. When they are younger, you are going to have more of the emotional needs...when they get older, we are preparing them more for the growth needs.” Dr. Alexander admitted that he felt it was difficult to have both the strong relationship that students have in self-contained classrooms with the academic challenge that students receive in a departmentalized setting. At the end of the interview with Dr. Alexander, we discussed the importance of principals deciding if one teacher can challenge students academically or if a team of teachers can build the proper relationships with all students. That is the challenge principals face when determining which organizational structure best meets the needs of their students.

In another study based on relationships, Becker (1987) found that students from lower socioeconomic statuses scored .20 standard deviations higher with self-contained classrooms when compared with schools using the departmentalized model. One principal, Mrs. Smith, interviewed for the current study, had a high free and reduced lunch rate of approximately seventy-three percent. She believed the school served as

students' safe place and that self-contained classrooms best met their needs. Mrs. Smith shared her story,

They get two meals a day...you can see that a lot of our kids those are the only two meals they get. The key for our at-risk kids...is feeling safe and loved but that feeling of being in a safe environment is a real big key for their academic success.

When discussing relationships and the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child, prior literature and the current study indicated that self-contained classrooms benefited students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies stresses the importance of relationships and knowing the child in the learner centered ideology. The goal of education in this ideology is to discover students' interests and to teach to those interests. Relationships are an important component of the learner centered ideology and self-contained classrooms. In contrast, the scholar academic ideology stresses the need for a liberal arts education where the teacher is an expert and the student is expected to learn the material from the expert (Schiro, 2008). Departmentalization allows teachers to become experts in academic subjects and puts a strain on the relationship factor because students do not spend as much time in the teacher's classroom.

Dewey (1938) began the conversation on the need to educate the whole child by identifying three important goals: (1) the development of intelligence, (2) the acquisition of socially useful skills, and (3) the healthy growth of the individual. All six of the principals in the current study addressed the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child at the elementary school level. However, they differed on which

organizational structure best met the needs of the whole child. Dr. Hill shared her thoughts on the whole child and relationships, “For me an expert teacher would be a teacher that looks at the whole child. We can be an expert in our field, and then not be an expert at relationships.” Dr. Hill continued her thoughts on meeting the needs of the whole child when she stated, “It is just not about them passing a test is important. And if those kids realize how much you care about them, then they are going to be willing to do the work for you.” Both the literature and the current study supported self-contained classrooms as the best organizational structure to meet the relationship needs of elementary students. Principals must balance the need of strong relationships with the need of students achieving at a high level of academic success, which leads to the next theme for the current study.

Success with Data. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) increased the federal government’s involvement in education by mandating annual assessments of student achievement through standardized testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This bill heightened the importance of academic success for each child. A number of scholars examined the association between organizational structure and success with data based on standardized testing (Garcia, 2007; Harris, 1996; Moore, 2009; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011). Moore (2009), Williams (2009), and Yearwood (2011) conducted quantitative studies and each found a significant increase in student math achievement in departmentalized classrooms. In addition, Yearwood’s study found a significant difference in reading achievement with higher reading scores in the departmentalized setting. The current study did not examine test scores from standardized testing in a

quantitative manner but did ask principals about their perceptions of organizational structure and student achievement.

Dr. Alexander's school transitioned from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization over the past few years. He shared a story about this transition.

We started out with fifth grade and we got our test scores and they went up...the next year we did it in fifth again and some fourth grade...the test scores rise again...even to the point where some third grade classes where I was at in science and social studies were doing it. Departmentalization...we have continued to do that and again we have seen the test scores rise...I know this since we went to departmentalization, our kids have been performing better...the data shows that it is successful with both the higher and lower [achieving student].

This story is a reflection of how Dr. Alexander credits departmentalization with higher test scores and student achievement. His school had the lowest free and reduced lunch rate of all of the principals interviewed for the current study with a rate of approximately twenty-eight percent.

In contrast to Dr. Alexander's story, Mrs. Smith was just as passionate about the role of self-contained classrooms in supporting the academic success of her students. Mrs. Smith shared that her schools' free and reduced lunch rate was approximately seventy-three percent. During our interview, Mrs. Smith explained her thoughts on *success with data*,

Our teachers feel very strongly that that's what allows our students to be successful. And so they want total control and they get to know their kids. They build that relationship with the kid and the parent. We feel very strongly that the

self-contained classroom is what allows our kids from the neighborhoods that we serve...it allows them to be successful.

Harris (1996) reported findings congruent with Mrs. Smith's thoughts on self-contained classrooms. Harris used the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Cognitive Abilities Test to determine which organizational structure better met the academic needs of the students. The departmentalized group had a mean reading achievement score of 5.51, and the self-contained group had a mean score of 6.1. The finding indicated that there was a significant difference at the $p = .05$ significance level in favor of the self-contained classroom in the area of reading. Harris did not mention the free and reduced rate of the students in her study, which leads me to wonder if there is a relationship between organizational structure and the socioeconomic level of the students. The current study found that the principal of the school with the highest free and reduced lunch rate passionately supported self-contained classrooms, while the principal with the lowest free and reduced lunch rate strongly promoted departmentalization. The principals of the schools with an average free and reduced rate were more open to either organizational structure.

Mrs. Thomas' fourth grade classrooms made the transition from self-contained classrooms to departmentalization in teams of two teachers. She was anxiously awaiting the results of their first standardized testing under the new organizational structure. As of the interview, Mrs. Thomas had only analyzed benchmark scores and reading level assessments. She shared her thoughts on student achievement,

I don't know what the data is going to show yet...I wouldn't say that we are any more or any less it is not that much of a difference which is what I was worried

about was student achievement. The No Child Left Behind Act puts that forefront in our minds.

Mrs. Thomas' school departmentalized in teams of two teachers, which some literature refers to as semi-departmentalized classrooms (Garcia, 2007). In a study that differentiated between semi-departmentalized classrooms and departmentalized classrooms, Garcia (2007) found that departmentalized schools had a higher mean scale score of 2041.22 on standardized testing compared to semi-departmentalized classrooms with a mean of 2026.52. The difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($p = .337$), and further research on the different types of arrangements possible within departmentalized classrooms would benefit administrators at the elementary level. The research would help principals understand the strengths and weaknesses of the different types of departmentalization. For example, true departmentalization would have each teacher only teaching one subject area; whereas semi-departmentalization may have the teachers teaching two subject areas and the students only having two teachers. The participants in the current study shared many different perceptions on the form of departmentalization they felt was best for their students, which shows that the decision is much deeper than just self-contained classrooms or departmentalization at the elementary level.

Differentiation was an important concept within the context of the theme, *success with data*, because it allows teachers to meet the needs of individual students by remediating lower achieving students and enriching higher achieving students. Many of the participants stressed the importance of differentiation in having higher student achievement. The principals also focused on the importance of teachers knowing the kids

if they are going to be successful with differentiation. Both Dr. Howard and Dr. Alexander believed it was easier to differentiate in the departmentalized setting. Dr. Howard shared, "...you can put more depth into your thinking instead of just making sure you have something planned for the day. I think you have more opportunity to try a lesson and so that in itself creates differentiation." Dr. Alexander also believed that departmentalization was conducive to differentiation and shared a story about teaching math,

...I can spread that lesson out and do various activities with varied levels of students in that classroom. I think that if the class wasn't departmentalized, the teacher would not have time to do it. You are giving that teacher more time to allow them to plan and to meet the needs for each specific class they are teaching.

The six participants interviewed for the current study had mixed feelings on which organizational structure was better for differentiation. Dr. Hill felt that teachers could differentiate and know the kids in both organizational structures. She stated, "...differentiation can work in both settings...making sure we are meeting the needs of individual children." The other three principals believed that differentiation and knowing the kids was much easier in a self-contained setting. Dr. Hightower shared her thoughts with me. "I think to differentiate well, you have to know your kids and relish your kids and I do feel that comes easier when you are focused on your twenty-seven kids...in a self-contained [setting]."

None of the literature reviewed for the current study specifically examined differentiation and academic success. The literature addressed the needs of the child within the sense of relationships (Becker, 1987; Dunn, 1952; McGrath & Rust, 2002;

McPartland, 1987) and student achievement (Garcia, 2007; Harris, 1996; Moore, 2009; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011), but did not specifically examine differentiation. This is one area in which the current study contributed to the research on organizational structures. Differentiation is an important component of standards-based classrooms, and principals should consider which organizational structure would better meet the needs of teachers to differentiate and have success with data.

When principals shared their thoughts in relation to the theme *success with data*, their beliefs in curriculum ideology affected their decision on organizational structures. For example, Dr. Alexander felt it was important to have a content expert teaching the academic subject areas, which relates to the scholar academic ideology. Dr. Alexander believed his school had more success with data because of the departmentalization. In contrast, Mrs. Smith felt that it was more important for students to develop a close bond with their teacher and for student interests to guide the schedule and not time, which reflects the learner centered ideology. Mrs. Smith believed that her school was successful academically because they focused on the needs of the students through the self-contained organizational structure. A principal's belief on Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies may affect his or her decision on organizational structure at the elementary school level.

Stakeholders' Perceptions Matter. The last major finding for the current study encompassed teachers, students, and parents perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary level. The literature addressed organizational structures from various perceptions (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011).

Teachers' Perceptions. The first sub-theme within this sixth theme included *teachers' perceptions* of organizational structures. All six participants in the current study stressed the importance of principals listening to their teachers when making a decision for his or her elementary school. Dr. Alexander's teachers supported departmentalization, and he explained one of the reasons for this support, "...one of the things about departmentalization is that every single teacher in this building has a subject they like to teach more than others...if that is your love and passion, why not let teachers teach that." Furthermore, Dr. Hill shared, "I want the teachers to do whatever they feel is their strength...I try to listen to my teachers and see what they think is best for them because they are the ones in the trenches every day." The notion of listening to teachers and allowing them to teach in an area of strength supported the findings from other studies (Liu, 2011; Williams, 2009) that highlighted teachers' beliefs on departmentalization and how this organizational structure enabled them to specialize in one subject area. Even though the participants listened to their teachers before making a decision, many of them required their teachers to deliver evidence supporting why the organizational structure they chose would best meet the needs of the students.

Brogan (1970) asked teachers to complete a questionnaire sharing their thoughts on departmentalization at the elementary level. Teachers shared the following disadvantages of departmentalization: (1) a need for integration of subject matter, (2) the daily schedule sometimes interfered with room activities, and (3) there was a lack of balance in the amount of homework. Additionally, teachers believed that there were advantages to departmentalization: (1) enthusiasm for the program, (2) an interest and desire for learning, (3) more time for subject preparation, (4) no evidence of poor

emotional or social adjustment, and (5) teachers were free to experiment with a wide variety of teaching. In agreement with Brogan's study (1970), one of the reasons Mrs. Thomas allowed her fourth grade teachers to switch from self-contained to departmentalization was because they felt burned-out from the number of papers to grade and preparing for so many content areas. Mrs. Thomas believed, "...as long as the teachers are for it, we are for it unless the data shows something different, unless we see some kind of drop in our scores and we can contribute it to that." Furthermore, Mrs. Thomas cautioned the idea of making decisions just based on teachers' perceptions. She stated, "I do think that the adults in the building can get clouded about what is easier for adults versus what is best for children...it's gotta be what is best for the kids." The current study supported administrators taking the time to listen to their teachers and consider their opinions before making the decision on organizational structure. Many of the participants had their teachers develop a plan to share with the principal on which organizational structure teachers felt best met their students' needs. Teachers are the staff members that must implement the organizational structure effectively, so it is important for teachers to agree with the principal's decision on organizational structure at the elementary school level.

Students' Perceptions. Another sub-theme within the major finding of *stakeholders' perceptions matter* is the idea of principals listening to *students' perceptions* when making decisions on organizational structure. Previous studies (Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002) examined students' perceptions in relation to organizational structure at the elementary level. All six of the participants interviewed for the current study commented on students' perceptions with

an agreement that students enjoy switching classes and having more than one teacher. Dr. Alexander shared, “They like it...they love the opportunity to go to different classrooms and to experience other teachers teaching different ways...they enjoy the transition of learning someone else and their style and the way they teach.” Mrs. Smith, who has all self-contained classrooms, agreed that fifth graders would probably enjoy changing classes, but passionately stated that was not a reason to change, “...some of our fifth graders are the ones that might would want to change classes just because they would think that was a neat thing to do. So that’s I think...would be their reasoning and that would not be my reasoning.”

In an interesting contrast to the data collected for the current study, Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa (2008) and Reed (2002) discovered negative student perceptions towards departmentalization. Their studies asked students about their perceptions through questionnaires; whereas, the current study examined the idea of students’ perceptions through the eyes of the principals. Chang, Munoz, and Koshewa (2008) found that departmentalization at the elementary school level negatively affected student ratings of classroom support, trust, and respect for teachers compared with self-contained classrooms. In addition, the study found results that were even more negative for students with three or more teachers and younger students (third grade) having several teachers in the departmentalized setting. In another study, Reed (2002) discovered that students felt that class time was lost due to switching classrooms for different subject areas and that managing materials for four classes was difficult for the students. In the current study, when asked about students’ perceptions, Mrs. Smith did address the issue of the important bond that a student can have with one teacher in a self-contained

classroom. Even though Mrs. Smith believes that students would enjoy having more than one teacher, she stressed the importance of the relationship factor with one teacher. Principals may want to talk with students to understand their perception before making an organizational structure change from self-contained to departmentalization. There was a stark difference between prior studies on students' perceptions and what principals believed students thought about departmentalization at the elementary level. Future studies could bridge this disconnect by interviewing principals, teachers, and students on their perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level.

Parents' Perceptions. The final sub-theme within the larger theme of *stakeholders' perceptions matter* is the idea of *parents' perceptions*. Reed (2002) examined organizational structures from parents' perspectives and discovered that parents felt their children could not manage materials for four different classrooms, their children struggled with refocusing after switching classes, and teachers were not accessible for conferencing in departmentalization. On a positive note, parents felt that students could successfully interact with four teachers, their children were successful with this model, and teachers provided children with sufficient time to complete assignments. Dr. Hightower examined this topic from a unique administrator/parent perspective,

My own personal child was here one of the years when we departmentalized and he seemed to like certain teachers better than others that were on the team...for some children it could be a relief to them if they didn't quite gel with a teacher..."

The data from the current study reflected the data from Reed's (2002) study because principals shared both positives and negatives from the perceptions that parents relayed to them. For example, Dr. Alexander had some parents tell him that their children love all of their teachers. Conversely, other parents said, "...it just doesn't fit my child very well...they are very unorganized...this is not what is best for Johnny...we get along great with Mrs. Smith but we don't get along good with Mrs. Johnson." The parents in Mrs. Hill's school supported the organizational structure used at each grade level, but they were concerned with how their children would do with the new math. With her school fully self-contained, Dr. Hightower shared that some of her parents wished her school departmentalized in the fifth grade to help with the transition to middle school. Findings from prior studies, as well as the current study, revealed that parents have mixed feelings on departmentalization at the elementary level and that the results are inconclusive. If administrators are considering switching organizational structures, they may want to ask some parents for their perceptions before making a change. The free and reduced lunch rate at the school may be a determining factor of which organizational structure the parents would prefer. The current study indicates that parents at a school with a low free and reduced lunch rate may support departmentalization while parents at a school with a higher free and reduced lunch rate may want their students in self-contained classrooms.

The current study, as well as those reviewed previously (Andrews, 2006; Brogan, 1970; Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Liu, 2011; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002; Williams, 2009; Yearwood, 2011), found mixed results in the theme *stakeholders' perceptions matter* when considering organizational structures at the elementary level. Principals in this study were able to share what they felt other stakeholders believed about different

organizational structures, but many of their thoughts were contradictory to other studies that directly examined the perspectives of these stakeholders. Future research could include qualitative case studies to examine the perceptions of the principal, teachers, students, and parents within one, or a number of elementary schools, to determine the attitudes of different stakeholders on organizational structures at the elementary school level.

Principals' Perceptions

Since the purpose of this study was to examine organizational structures at the elementary school level from principals' perspectives, I feel it is important to reexamine prior studies (Andrews, 2006; Yearwood, 2011) that included principals' perceptions in the context of the findings of the current study. In Yearwood's study (2011) principals answered a survey to identify the organizational structures used in their respective schools. Some of the questions in the survey included: school name, organizational structure used in fifth grade classrooms, and organizational structures used in third grade classrooms. The results of the survey helped Yearwood identify the schools that had self-contained classrooms and the schools that departmentalized in the gated grades (third and fifth) in the State of Georgia. In the current study, demographic profiles (Appendix B) provided the information needed to understand the organizational structures used at each grade level within the purposeful sample of elementary schools chosen for the study. Additionally, it provided data on participants' past experiences with organizational structures. The data collected from the demographic profile informed interview questions with the participants.

Andrews (2006) conducted a study to determine if student performance in mathematics improved through use of departmentalization in the fifth grade. In addition to examining the teachers' perceptions, Andrews interviewed the principal of the school to discover her perceptions of departmentalization at the fifth grade. Results indicated that the principal permitted the model, although she had reservations. She felt this model was highly effective for her current team of teachers because of their strengths. The principal shared that in the past she both supported and opposed departmentalization at the elementary level. The principal based her decision on teachers' strengths when deciding on the organizational structure for her school. She felt that some teachers were not suited for departmentalization. Andrews' study was significant to the current study because she interviewed a principal and discovered the meaning behind the principal's decision of organizational structure at the elementary level. More importantly, the finding supports the theme *it's all about the people* from the current study. Dr. Hill stressed in her interview that she based the decision of organizational structure on the teachers and their strengths. She shared,

I want the teachers to do whatever they feel is their strength. I have some teachers that don't feel comfortable teaching the reading and the writing. And then I have other teachers that are very confident in those areas. So I want the teachers to teach to their strengths.

The current study corroborates the findings from Andrews' study and shows administrators that they should examine the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers before making a decision on organizational structure at the elementary school level. In addition, the current study included interviews with six principals and extensive

qualitative analysis resulting in six themes, *what works, transitions, it's all about the people, relationships are the foundation, success with data, and stakeholder's perceptions matter*, that principals should consider before making a decision about organizational structures at the elementary school level.

Contributions of the Conceptual Frameworks

Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies were the conceptual frameworks used to inform data collection and analysis procedures in the current study. All six principals believed it was easier for teachers to have stronger relationships with their students in self-contained classrooms. Dr. Alexander, a strong proponent of departmentalization, recognized this and stated, "The learner centered ideology...if you can do that and be departmentalized then I think you have the best of both worlds." Dr. Alexander asked a question during the interview, "Do you think a loving, nurturistic, holistic classroom where I am holding on to you all day is better or do you think a classroom where they are gaining knowledge? Obviously, you want a classroom with both of these." In agreement with Dr. Alexander, Dr. Howard also supported the learner-centered ideology by stressing, "My reason for departmentalizing or being self-contained is always to establish a learning centered [classroom]...It's never just to have a content expert." Dr. Howard believed it was very difficult for a teacher to create a "learner centered environment for every child for every day, eight hours a day. That is almost an impossible, impossible thing." Lastly, Dr. Hightower shared her thoughts on the struggle between subject matter and learners' interests,

You've got to take in the learner's interest and the subject matter is also important. We wouldn't have subjects if it wasn't important. So you kinda gotta blend the two to be most effective. I think it would be easier in a self-contained classroom, but I don't think you couldn't do it in departmentalization.

Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies helped form the idea of relationships, deficiency needs and learner centered ideology versus academics, growth needs and scholar-academic ideology.

Based on findings from the current study, principals must determine if their teachers can form strong relationships within the departmentalized setting or have strong academics in the self-contained setting before deciding which organizational structure would best meet the needs of his or her school.

Limitations

One aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to acknowledge limitations in your study, which allows the reader to determine the credibility of one's findings (Glesne, 2011). The limitations for the current study relate to the sample. According to Patton, "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (2002, p. 244). The goal of qualitative research is to examine a small number of participants to allow for greater depth. By including six participants in the current study, I was able to collect data through a demographic profile, a master schedule, and an interview from each principal of the schools selected for the study. I recognize that the entire purposeful sample came from a county in Middle Georgia and that this type of purposeful sample is one limitation to the current study. I did select principals across a continuum of the organizational structures with two strongly supporting departmentalization, two supporting both

organizational structures, and two supporting self-contained classrooms. The variety of participants may increase the likelihood of readers relating to one or more of the schools in the current study.

The other limitation for the current study related to the inability for readers to generalize the results to all elementary schools. Generalizability “refers to the degree to which a sample represents the population of interest” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008, p. 102). By providing context of each school in the study, my goal was to help the reader relate to one or more of the principals and be able to apply all or part of the data to his or her school. At a minimum, principals may be able to apply the descriptions of the themes to their elementary school before making an organizational structure decision. As in all qualitative research, I recognize that my findings really only apply to my sample, but that the findings do have potential for transferability to other school settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

With the limited number of studies approaching organizational structures from principals’ perceptions, it would be beneficial to have additional studies that strive to understand the meaning behind this topic. More specifically, with forty-five states adopting the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for the 2012-2013 school year (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012), additional research on principals’ perceptions of organizational structures at the elementary school level and how the new CCSS influenced their decisions would help practicing administrators. Furthermore, some principals make the organizational structure decision based on student assessment of mastery of subject areas. For example, when students take a writing test with a prompt, teachers must be knowledgeable with preparing students to pass that type of test;

therefore, this may influence principals to have literacy specialists at the elementary level. With the new CCSS, assessments will change and some states, including Georgia, will convert to an assessment tool called Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (Achieve, Inc., 2012) and this change may influence what organizational structure principals use at the elementary school level. I believe additional studies should examine the influence of various assessments on administrators' decisions of school organizational structures.

Another recommendation is to consider schools' free and reduced lunch rates when examining organizational structures at the elementary school level. There was a large gap between Dr. Alexander's and Mrs. Smith's perceptions, and this may be due to demographic factors within their respective schools. Dr. Alexander's school had a free and reduced lunch rate at approximately twenty-eight percent, while Mrs. Smith's school had a free and reduced lunch rate at approximately seventy-three percent. I found these two principals to be the most passionate in their beliefs for one organizational structure over another. Dr. Alexander was a strong proponent of departmentalization, while Mrs. Smith was a strong proponent of self-contained classrooms. Choosing a purposeful sample of schools on each end of the free and reduced lunch rate continuum may provide insight into what organizational structure best meets students' needs in a particular setting. Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies could be a helpful lens to use when conducting a study based on the free and reduced lunch rate of schools because of the conflict between relationships (deficiency needs/learner centered ideology) and academics (growth needs/scholar academic ideology).

Lastly, there was a disconnect in students' perceptions of organizational structures in prior studies (Chang, Munoz, & Koshewa, 2008; Parker, 2005; Reed, 2002) and principals' perceptions of students feelings toward departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary level in the current study. Future studies could use a qualitative case study approach where the researcher pursues an "intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). A case study would allow the researcher to collect data on administrators, teachers, students, and parents' perceptions of departmentalized or self-contained classrooms within the same school building or several elementary schools within one county or district. Comparing and contrasting this rich data from all of the stakeholders involved at the school could provide a more complete picture of what various stakeholders feel are best for the students at that elementary school.

Conclusion

There were a number of important findings from this study that could help practicing and future administrators make the difficult decision of what organizational structure best meets the needs of students and teachers within their school building. Principals should examine the six major findings from the current study and the description of each school sampled to determine what implications the data may have for their schools. Specifically, the current study found the following six important themes: *what works, transitions, it's all about the people, relationships are the foundation, success with data, and stakeholders' perceptions matter.*

While the themes reflect the data collected for the current study, it is also important to examine this topic through the lens of Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of

Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Maslow's theory helps one understand the importance of meeting deficiency needs through relationships and meeting growth needs through a high level of academic success. Schiro's ideologies stress the importance of students having a voice in curriculum through the learner centered ideology and teachers teaching what they believe students should know through the scholar academic lens. Having background knowledge in both conceptual frameworks may help administrators make a more informed decision based on their perceptions of students' needs.

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, guiding conceptual frameworks, research question, limitations, and a researcher's statement. Chapter 2 expanded on the introduction in Chapter 1 by providing an in-depth review of literature on this topic with specific focus on the following areas: (1) Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, (2) Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies, (3) meeting the social/emotional needs of the students, (4) having high levels of student achievement, and (5) the perceptions of the different stakeholders involved with the organizational structures. Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the methodology through the research design, sample selection, descriptions of the schools selected for the current study, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, a researcher's statement, and a summary. Chapter 4 described the results of the principals' interviews, which resulted in six major findings based on the research question. Additionally, the documents with the master schedules provided supportive data to the study by showing how schools departmentalized and when the transitions took place. Chapter 5 discussed the six major

findings within the context of prior studies and the conceptual frameworks for the current study, Maslow's (1943, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Schiro's (2008) concept of curriculum ideologies. Finally, the chapter covered limitations, future directions for research, and a conclusion.

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Appendix A:

Semi-Structured Interview for Elementary School Principals

Grand Tour Question:

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

Past Experiences in Relation to this Topic:

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

Conceptual Lens in Relation to this Topic:

3. Why do you choose to use the organizational structure that you use at your school?
4. Has the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 affected your decision on organizational structure at the elementary level?
5. Which organizational structure do you feel best meets the social and emotional needs of the Whole Child and why?
6. Have your teachers' perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms influenced your decision of organizational structure at the elementary level?
7. Have your students' perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms influenced your decision of organizational structure at the elementary level?
8. Have your students' parents' perceptions of self-contained or departmentalized classrooms influenced your decision of organizational structure at the elementary level? Please explain.
9. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory addresses the deficiency and growth needs of students. The deficiency needs stress the importance of students having their physiological needs met and the need for feeling safe and loved. The growth needs

stress the importance of students being academically successful so they can reach their fullest potential. Do you believe this theory has a relationship to the organizational structure of an elementary school? Please explain.

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

Closing Question:

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

Appendix B:
Demographic Information on Principals

1. Are you presently using self-contained, departmentalization, or a combination of both organizational structures in the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels?
2. When you were a teacher at the elementary level, were you departmentalized or in a self-contained classroom?
3. As a parent of elementary-aged children, were your children in self-contained classrooms or were they in a departmentalized setting?
4. When you were a child in elementary school, were you placed in a self-contained classroom or did your teachers departmentalize?

Appendix C:
Reflective Commentary Samples

Reflective Commentary #8 (February 26, 2012)

Transcribing the Data Collected from the Voyage...

At this point in the voyage, I have collected mounds of data through the interviews, and it was time to type the transcript for each interview so I could truly get to the meaning behind the data and have an understanding of organizational structures at the elementary level. By typing the transcripts, I developed a first impression of each interview and what the principal stressed during the interview. I found my wheels turning constantly while listening to the principal and typing his or her words verbatim. I was amazed by how much I missed from the actual interview. It showed me how important it is to audio record an interview so a researcher can go back and listen to it word for word.

I was very thankful that I started the interview with a grand tour question. This allowed the interview to go in the direction that the principal took it through his or her response. After probing the response of the principals based on their responses to the first question, I was able to scan my list of interview questions and see what I felt would be beneficial to ask. In some cases, the principal had already answered many of the questions. In other cases, the question did not feel right because of the direction of the interview. I was also thankful I ended the interview with an open-ended question because I found that most of the principals summed up their perceptions on this topic with that question, which reinforced something already stated, or added new data to the study.

I am VERY excited about the next phase of this study---coding the data. I feel this is the point I will begin gaining answers to the many questions I had when I started

this voyage. My hope is that the data sheds some light on principals' perceptions on this topic so I can begin to understand why principals make the decisions they do for their building. Even though my ship is sailing home, I have much work to do if I am going to make sense of the data and help future captains and their crews.

Reflective Commentary #9 (March 9, 2012)

Initial Coding with David Alexander...

As the ship navigates back to the mainland, I find myself heavily involved with the initial coding phase of the data I collected on this voyage. At this point, I have completed the initial coding for David Alexander, principal of Mount Zion Elementary School. Dr. Alexander believed in departmentalization in the upper grades at the elementary level because he felt it was important to have a subject expert who can differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners, which results in higher test scores for his school. He stated, "We do departmentalization because we feel that is what is best for our kids here at school...they are better prepared if they have departmentalization in the elementary school when they go to middle school."

After analyzing the transcript, it is obvious that Dr. Alexander considered transitions to be an important aspect of departmentalization at the elementary level. He stated, "...you have to teach them how to transition...and having all of their materials...so those are all things teachers have to work out." He goes on to say, "The two team type thing has worked out pretty good for us because it has knocked down the transitions in half." This is one reason the principal supported departmentalization with two teachers over having three or four teachers on a team---it cut down on transitions. Dr. Alexander's school had a low free and reduced rate for the Dewey County School

System. He stated, "...our higher achieving students tend to be a little more organized. I think they take the transition a little bit easier."

Another theme evident in Dr. Alexander's data was how departmentalization supports subject area experts and the use of differentiation in the classroom. He stated, "...why not let them be experts in a couple of subjects...allow them to go more in-depth in their planning. This will allow them to differentiate their learning for students, too." Dr. Alexander cares about teachers' perceptions by stating, "I've got people who like to teach math and they are experts in math...our teachers are overwhelmed with so much stuff." He continues his thoughts by saying, "Teachers can prepare longer in departmentalized setting...there is no doubt that they can become more of an expert in that subject that they are teaching." One of his most memorable quotes from the interview was, "I am going to be good in five [subjects], and I'm going to be great in three. I am going to be outstanding, unbelievable in two." That quote is at the heart of why Dr. Alexander supported departmentalization at the elementary level; he truly believed that the students would receive better instruction when teachers could teach their favorite subject areas and have fewer subjects to plan for on a daily basis.

When I asked Dr. Alexander about the curriculum ideologies, he stated, "The importance of gaining subject matter from experts...goes back to departmentalization...having your experts teaching in those areas where we consider them experts." Interestingly, Dr. Alexander related differentiation to the learner-centered ideology where you are meeting the individual needs of the children and believed that it was easier to differentiate in a departmentalized setting. The discussion ended with him saying, "The learner-centered ideology---if you can do that and be departmentalized than

I think you have the best of both worlds.” Dr. Alexander felt that his teachers could meet the social and emotional needs of students through the departmentalized setting.

At this point in my research, I do believe that a principal must ask if it is easier for a teacher to be an expert in all subjects so they can provide the emotional support to their students in the self-contained classroom, or can teachers provide the needed emotional support in a departmentalized setting? This is not an easy question to answer, and I look forward to getting deeper in the data so I gain more knowledge on this topic.

It’s time to check on the ship and verify that everything is going smoothly. In the morning, I will begin my initial coding for my second interview with Mrs. Rebekah Smith. I am excited to see how the data compares and contrasts with the prior interview. I was told that Mrs. Smith’s school was very different from Dr. Alexander’s school and that some of the data may surprise me. The surprises in this voyage will only make this process more fun in my research.

Appendix D:
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants
PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-02767-2012

INVESTIGATOR: Richard Rogers

PROJECT TITLE: Principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level

DETERMINATION:

- This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) 1 & 2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.
 - Exemption of this research protocol from Institutional Review Board oversight is pending. You may **not** begin your research until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of exemption. You may send your responses to irb@valdosta.edu.
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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal. If you make any of these suggested changes to your protocol, please submit revisions so that IRB has a complete protocol on file.

Recommendations for consent form revisions:

1. "Assurance of Confidentiality" section, second paragraph: Suggest replacing "to keep responses anonymous" with "to keep identity confidential." Anonymity only exists when no one, including the researcher, can associate identity with responses.
2. Please remove the box and the statement above it that refers to IRB approval. The IRB does not affix an approval stamp to exempt protocols.

Barbara H. Gray _____ Date: January 10, 2012

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Barbara H. Gray, IRB Administrator
or 229-259-5045.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu

cc: Dr. Don W. Leech (Dept. Head)
Dr. D. Eric Archer (Advisor)

Appendix E:
Consent to Participate in Research

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled "Principals' Perceptions of Departmentalization and Self-Contained Classrooms at the Elementary School Level." This research project is being conducted by Richard Rogers, a student in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology of the College of Education at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

Purpose of the Research: This study involves research. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study will be to understand principals' perceptions of departmentalization and self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level.

Procedures: You will be asked to provide me a copy of your school's master schedule and to participate in a semi-structured interview that will begin with a grand tour question. I may ask you additional questions based on your past experiences and the conceptual lens in this study.

The interview will last approximately one hour to an hour and a half at your school. During that time, you will be asked questions pertaining to this study. The interview will be tape recorded to assist in data analysis. You will also be asked to comment on the themes derived from the data.

Possible Risks or Discomfort: Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks.

By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits: Although you may not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of the meaning behind your decision on organizational structures at the elementary level. The knowledge gained from this study may contribute to addressing this important issue at the researcher's school.

Costs and Compensation: Besides your time for the interview and to comment on the themes derived from the data, there are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.

