

FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE TEACHERS' AND PUPILS' OPINIONS AND
ATTITUDES TOWARD A SEMI-DEPARTMENTALIZED ORGANIZATION
IN MARLATT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, MANHATTAN, KANSAS

by 632

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

For many years a difference of opinion has existed regarding the merits of a departmentalized organization in the intermediate grades. During the school year 1967-1968, Marlatt Elementary School, Manhattan, Kansas, set up a semi-departmentalized organization in grades five and six. The teachers at Marlatt felt the program was a great success and planned to continue it in the following school year. However, no concerted effort was made to record an evaluation of this organization from a teacher's and a student's point of view. Since many criticisms of the departmental system stem from its effects on teachers and students, it therefore appeared necessary to devise a basis for evaluating teacher and student attitudes and opinions toward the newly established organization at Marlatt School.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The objective of the study was to determine: What were the opinions and attitudes of Marlatt's fifth and sixth grade teachers and pupils concerning the semi-departmentalized organization in which they were involved?

Importance of the study. The issue of departmentalization in the intermediate grades is a highly debatable one. Therefore, each school should carefully evaluate any change in this direction in light of the advantages and disadvantages of a departmentalized organization. This study is an attempt to discover teachers' and students' views toward the newly established semi-departmentalized program at Marlatt. From this study, valuable information can be gained to help the teachers and administrators determine the success or failure of this departmentalized setup.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Ability grouping. Pupils are classified into homogeneous sections with reference to intelligence and/or aptitude for the purpose of instruction.

Departmentalization. Each instructor teaches only one or two subjects in which he is a specialist; either the teacher moves from room to room to teach the various classes or the pupils shift from room to room during the successive periods of the school day.

Elementary school. The elementary school includes grades one through six unless expressly stated to include grades seven and eight.

Intermediate grades. Grades four, five, and six are referred to as intermediate grades.

Self-contained classroom. Only one teacher is assigned to each grade or group and each pupil has, therefore, only one teacher.

Semi-departmentalization. A given grade is departmentalized in only some subject areas. The remaining subjects are taught in a self-contained classroom.

Specialist. A teacher has completed with distinction an undergraduate major or an undergraduate minor in a specific academic area.

Description of the setting. The fifth and sixth grade students at Marlatt are located in a new wing of the building. This wing is in the shape of a block with three rooms on either side of a centralized planter. The three fifth grade rooms are on the north side of the building, and the three sixth grade rooms are on the south side. For ease of explanation, only the fifth grade rooms will be described, as the sixth grade rooms are arranged in exactly the same pattern except for being on the opposite side of the new wing.

The middle room has movable walls on the east and west sides. The walls may be moved back, resulting in one large room made up of the three individual rooms. When the movable

walls are closed, the students must pass from room to room through the outer hallway or through inner doors which connect each of the two outer rooms with the middle room. The movable walls remain closed except during music, and when it is desirable to have all three rooms together for an instructional presentation or group work. Students are organized with approximately twenty-six pupils to a homeroom. Each homeroom belongs to one teacher, known as the homeroom teacher. Each teacher is wholly responsible for the approximate twenty-six students in her homeroom. This includes grading, record-keeping, and any other requirements that would be true of a teacher in a self-contained classroom.

Science, social studies and English are departmentalized with each subject taught in a different room, therefore, students exchange rooms for the two subjects not taught in their homeroom.

From 9-10 A.M., each student remains with his homeroom teacher for the opening exercises, lunch count, math, and spelling. At 10 A.M., the first switch in classrooms takes place. For example, teacher A's children go to teacher B's room for English, teacher B's children go to teacher C's room for social studies, and teacher C's children go to teacher A's room for science. This period ends at 10:40 A.M. when a bell rung by one of the students, dismisses the children for recess. At 11 A.M., the children begin reading.

Each pupil goes into one of the three classrooms according to his reading ability. The low group gathers in one end-room, the average group in the other end-room, and the high group gathers in the middle-room.

At 1 P.M., each teacher again has her homeroom students. From 1-2 P.M., the teacher reads to her children, has a study hall, or engages in an activity of her own choosing. The teacher then uses the remainder of the period to teach her special subject to her homeroom children, (science, social studies, or English). At 2 P.M., the second switch takes place. The children move in the opposite direction from that described above. In this class, the child receives instruction in the third area, (science, social studies, or English). At 2:40 P.M., a bell dismisses the group for recess.

Beginning about 3 P.M., the children participate in music or art. For this, they are seated at their own homeroom desks. Music is taught by one teacher, after opening the movable doors between the classrooms. On alternate days with music, art is taught in each of the separate rooms, with the movable walls closed.

As can be seen, a semi-departmentalized system exists with science, social studies, and English being the departmentalized subjects. The remaining subjects are taught by the homeroom teacher, though children may have any one of the

three teachers for reading, depending on what ability group they are in. All moving is done by the children. Thus, teachers do not exchange rooms.

Organization of remainder of the report. Chapter II will review the related literature and research since 1960. In this chapter, the advantages and disadvantages of a departmentalized system and recent research will be discussed. Chapter III will center around the construction and evaluation of the study. Chapter IV will state the conclusions from this evaluation. An annotated bibliography will come after the last chapter, followed by an Appendix containing the questionnaires given to teachers and pupils.

Limitations of the study. The review of literature has been limited to those articles and books written between 1960 and 1968. In addition, generalizations and conclusions made from an evaluation of the questionnaires will be limited to the situation at Marlatt Elementary School. The study will further be limited to fifth and sixth grade teachers and pupils.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

By the mid century, 1959, departmentalization was losing favor as a method of organization in the elementary school. However, there appeared to be a slight trend toward more departmentalization just three years later in 1962. This trend seemed to be steadily increasing, though still far from replacing the self-contained classroom organization. The review of literature presented here has been limited to that written after 1960, due to this new interest in departmentalization in grades four, five, and six, and up to 1968, when this evaluation took place. This review will examine the literature and research related to the advantages and disadvantages of departmentalization in elementary grades.

Literature concerning the advantages of departmentalization. Most authors agree that departmentalization in the elementary grades does not belong before fourth grade. Many feel it should not be initiated until at least fifth grade. When departmentalization is put into effect in these intermediate grades, many advantages can be found. Johnson points this out by saying, "Full departmentalization is a rarity today and even semi-departmentalization is confined almost entirely to intermediate grades. But for some such measure of semi-departmental organization, there seems to be today

a much stronger case."¹ William B. Ragan² points out several of these advantages claimed for the departmentalized situation. These are:

1. Due to the new demands on subject matter, particularly in science and mathematics, it is no longer possible for just one teacher to keep up. Only a teacher who has specialized in a discipline can do this. Departmentalization would allow this specialization.
2. Departmentalization makes it easier for a teacher to keep up with and provide new methods, materials and equipment because they don't have so many subjects to prepare for.
3. More young men may be attracted to teaching elementary school due to this specialization.
4. It is easier to supply special equipment for one or two rooms than it is to provide the same equipment for all classrooms.

Most authors list these advantages, but ignore other

¹F. H. Johnson, "New Appraisal of Semi-Departmentalization in the Elementary School," Canadian Education and Research Digest, 6:70, March, 1965.

²William Ragan, Modern Elementary Curriculum (third edition, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 148.

benefits. F. H. Johnson³ points out some additional advantages as follows:

1. The child receives better instruction when the teacher has time to be well prepared in his or her subject.
2. A subject is not apt to be passed over due to a teacher's inadequate feelings in a particular area.
3. Teacher morale is higher with his confidence of knowledge.
4. A thorough understanding of the processes of learning are more easily presented with departmentalization. This would eliminate overemphasis on the product rather than the process, particularly in science and math.

Further important advantages are summarized by B. B. Hirsch.⁴ They are:

1. Children are exposed to a wide variety of teaching methods and learning experiences.
2. Children's social experiences are broadened by providing additional opportunities to meet new personalities.

³Johnson, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴B. B. Hirsch, "Departmentalization: The Space Age Elementary Program," New York State Education, 51:34-35, October, 1963.

3. Personality conflicts between teachers and students are reduced.
4. Periodic physical movement by the children prevents fatigue and boredom.
5. Short, well-planned and well motivated classes lessen student boredom. The teacher's interest and enthusiasm is contagious.
6. Departmentalization in the intermediate grades facilitates pupils transition to junior high where they must adjust to this type of organization.
7. Children think of a specialist as an authority, a source of enlightenment, and a person they can emulate.
8. A weak and inexperienced teacher would not remain with the pupils all day.

Literature concerning the disadvantages of departmentalization. Many authors concur when presenting the disadvantages of a departmental organization in the intermediate grades. Johnson⁵ points out several limitations of the departmentalized system in elementary grades. These are:

1. There is a problem with integration of learning experiences to insure maximum transfer of learning. This integration of subject matter might be

⁵Johnson, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

achieved more easily by a single teacher.

2. This organization is too regimented. It restricts the freedom of the teacher.
3. Teachers may over-stress their area of interest in relationship to other subjects of the curriculum. This may lead to more homework for the student.
4. Teachers know less about children when they see them in just one subject for a limited time and thus do not get an overall view of the child.
5. The emotional and social adjustment may not be as good as if the child were under a single teacher.

In a summary by the National Education Association,⁶ more disadvantages can be found. They are as follows:

1. Scheduling is difficult, especially in finding large enough blocks of time for thoroughly covering each subject.
2. Children become clock watchers and lose time in changing classes. Changing classes can be confusing.
3. There is a difficulty in finding teachers who are trained in a special field.

⁶"Departmentalization in Elementary Schools: Summary," Education Digest, 31:49, April, 1966.

In addition to these disadvantages, Ragan⁷ points out two other disadvantages as follows:

1. This plan encourages a teacher to regard himself as a specialist of subject matter rather than a specialist in working with children.
2. Routine matters such as record-keeping, evaluation, guidance, and reporting to parents are difficult to handle.

Supporters of a departmental or semi-departmental organization in the intermediate grades have ready answers to combat some of these claimed disadvantages. With regard to social adjustment, Johnson⁸ points to the fact that there is no research evidence to support the theory that the child's social adjustment in any way suffers when taught by more than one teacher. Further, Anderson⁹ says that on the basis of present information, it must be assumed that the adjustment of children in a departmental situation is not inferior to that of children in a self-contained classroom.

⁷Ragan, loc. cit.

⁸F. H. Johnson, "New Appraisal of Semi-Departmentalization in the Elementary School," Canadian Education and Research Digest, 6:69, March, 1965.

⁹R. C. Anderson, "Case for Teacher Specialization in Elementary School," The Elementary School Journal, 62:257, February, 1962.

Broadhead¹⁰ supports this belief when he indicates that a thorough study of Education Index and Dissertation Abstracts over the past ten years reveals no research indicating whether a semi-departmental type of elementary school organization promotes good or poor social adjustment among students. Harris¹¹ points out that a departmentalized organization is neither demonstrably helpful nor definitely harmful to children.

When considering the individual attention a child gets under a departmentalized organization, J. M. Bahner¹² suggests that a group of teachers may in fact learn to know one hundred twenty different pupils better than one teacher with her own limited powers of observation can get to know thirty students in a self-contained classroom. Johnson¹³ points out that it is quite possible to pool the knowledge of several teachers about a child under a semi-departmentalized system. As a result of this pooling, the teachers will have a more perceptive view of the child's personality and special

¹⁰F. C. Broadhead, "Pupil Adjustment in the Semi-Departmental Elementary School," The Elementary School Journal, 60:385, April, 1960.

¹¹Chester Harris, (ed.), Encyclopedia of Educational Research (third edition; New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 427.

¹²J. M. Bahner, "Team Teaching in the Elementary School," Education, 85:338, February, 1965.

¹³Johnson, op. cit., p. 71.

abilities. Further, Anderson¹⁴ believes that a teacher who is a master in an area has a frame of reference to evaluate a child's development and can read signs of misunderstanding in a child's behavior to a greater degree than can a teacher in a self-contained organization.

Many authors believe that integration of subject matter is quite possible in a departmentalized organization. As Bahner¹⁵ points out, integration will surely result when several teachers plan together in a departmental situation. He further says that compartmentalization of subject material can result in a self-contained classroom just as easily as in a departmentalized one.

Research studies on departmentalization. Johnson¹⁶ points out that there are many degrees of departmentalization in the intermediate grades. The term has been used to refer to specialists teaching all subjects in all grades and to refer to the use of a few specialists in an otherwise self-contained classroom. Due to this wide use of the term, research has been inconclusive on the subject of departmentalization as compared with the self-contained classroom.

¹⁴Anderson, op. cit., p. 255.

¹⁵Bahner, loc. cit.

¹⁶Johnson, op. cit., p. 65.

In 1968, a survey¹⁷ of elementary principals was conducted. Thousands of principals were sent questionnaires concerning their methods of organization. About sixty-six principals in one hundred considered departmentalization a very valuable plan for upper elementary grades.

One departmental plan is the "Dual Progress Plan" described by George B. Stoddard.¹⁸ It represents an attempt to combine the main advantages of departmentalization with the stabilizing factor of the homeroom teacher. This program was introduced into the Ossning and Long Beach, New York school systems in 1958-1959. This program, similar in many ways to the program at Marlatt, is working with reported success.

The Tulsa school system is a semi-departmentalized one established as early as 1926. Each class receives instruction from a homeroom teacher for a half day in the core subjects of math, language arts, and social studies. For the rest of the day, these elementary children are taught by specialist teachers. Broadhead¹⁹ did a comparative study

¹⁷The Elementary School Principalship in 1968, A Research Study Prepared by the Department of Elementary School Principals (National Education Association, 1968), p. 103.

¹⁸George D. Stoddard, The Dual Progress Plan, A New Philosophy and Program in Elementary Education (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961).

¹⁹Broadhead, op. cit., pp. 385-390.

using fifth grade Tulsa school children as the experimental group and a norm group of fifth graders from schools where children had been taught in nothing but a self-contained classroom. Social adjustment was evaluated by means of the SRA Junior Inventory. This study found the Tulsa children from semi-departmentalized schools to be superior in social adjustment as compared to the norm group. Livingston²⁰ did another study of the Tulsa school children. He found that Tulsa children who had experienced semi-departmentalization all the way from grade one on showed significantly better scores in personal and social adjustment than did the group that had been semi-departmentalized after grade two. He also found that those children under a semi-departmental situation were better adjusted than the norm group from self-contained classrooms.

In a survey by Coffin,²¹ teachers, parents, and students revealed very favorable attitudes toward their departmentalized elementary program.

Though this study is not directly concerned with academic achievement, a short review of research about achievement is of help in getting an overall view of departmentalization

²⁰A. H. Livingston, "Does Departmental Organization Affect Children's Adjustment," The Elementary School Journal, 61:217-220, January, 1961.

²¹G. C. Coffin, "Are Your Elementary Grades Properly Organized?" School Management, 5:62, December, 1961.

in the elementary school. Coffin²² conducted a study based on a battery of tests measuring academic achievement and scholastic aptitudes. Matched pairs of students were designated. It was found that those in the departmentalized program had significantly greater scores than those in the self-contained classroom situation in every subject area but math, where there was no significant difference.

Price²³ believes that it is apparent from her review of the literature on departmentalization that no general conclusions can be drawn regarding its relative instructional efficiency in arithmetic or other curricular areas. She noted that many of the studies on achievement under departmentalization were not carefully designed and were inconsistent in their findings.

Summary. In summary, it may be concluded that there are many advantages and disadvantages to a departmentalized program in the intermediate grades with rather inconclusive research to support either the advantages or the disadvantages. While departmentalization or semi-departmentalization at the elementary level is gaining in popularity at the present time, it remains to be seen what the future movement

²²Ibid.

²³E. B. Price and others, "Comparative Achievement with Departmentalized and Self-contained Classroom Organization," Arithmetic Teacher, 14:212, March, 1967.

will be. It would appear from this review of literature that it will grow steadily as an organizational program in the intermediate grades.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Construction. Each fifth and sixth grade student at Marlatt Elementary School (ninety-one fifth grade students and seventy sixth grade students) was given a questionnaire on May 26, 1969, during the first hour of the day. One fifth grade teacher gave the questionnaire directions to all fifth grade students at one time, and one sixth grade teacher gave the questionnaire directions to all sixth grade students at the same time. The teacher in charge of giving the questionnaire first read all questions to the students, and then the pupils were given as much time as needed to answer the questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to evaluate as many of the claimed advantages and disadvantages of a semi-departmentalized system as plausible through student reactions to each question. The questionnaire was answered anonymously. There was, however, a question to indicate grade level. At the same time students were answering their questionnaire, the six fifth and sixth grade teachers responded to a teacher's questionnaire.

Evaluation of student questionnaire. In response to the question, "Do you prefer having more than one teacher?" the results were as follows:

	<u>Fifth</u>	<u>Sixth</u>	<u>Totals</u>
A. Yes	61	58	119
B. No	9	4	13
C. It makes little or no difference	20	8	28

Students seemed greatly in favor of having several teachers.

The second question was, "Do you believe your three teachers are enthusiastic about the subjects they are teaching?" Responses were:

	<u>Fifth</u>	<u>Sixth</u>	<u>Totals</u>
A. Yes	83	47	130
B. No	4	11	15
C. Other	3	12	15

Most pupils seemed to feel teachers were enthusiastic. In summary, the comments indicated that some students felt one or two were enthusiastic and the remainder were not. Since a student in a self-contained classroom might possibly have the unenthusiastic teacher all the time, this is a very important advantage to having more than one teacher, as in a departmentalized situation.

"Do you feel your subjects would be more interesting with just one teacher teaching all subjects?" received the following response:

	<u>Fifth</u>	<u>Sixth</u>	<u>Totals</u>
A. Yes	13	4	17
B. No	76	66	142
C. Other	1	0	1