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## A correlation study to assess the academic achievement of ability grouped and nongrouped fifth grade mathematics students

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A CORRELATION STUDY TO ASSESS  
THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF  
ABILITY GROUPED AND NONGROUPED  
FIFTH GRADE MATHEMATICS STUDENTS

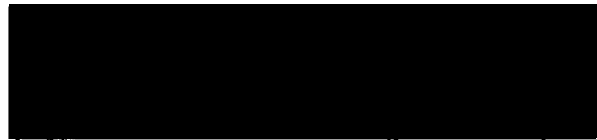
MASTER'S PROJECT

Submitted to the Department of Elementary Education,  
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

by

Susan D. Martin  
University of Dayton  
Dayton, Ohio  
April, 1990

Approved by:



Signature of Advisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be the initials 'J'.

My sincere gratitude to all of the family, friends and students who gave me the support and encouragement needed to complete this project. A special thanks to Bill Minckler, Joe Martin and Holly whose assistance enabled me to turn my thoughts into reality.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Ability grouping has long been viewed as an acceptable answer to the question "How do you teach a group of children with varied learning abilities?" Many educators feel that remedial students have a better self concept when they compete with others of similar ability (Peterson, 1989). Teachers have also found that it is easier to teach a homogeneous group than a heterogeneous group. However, it was the opinion of the writer that ability grouping offers few opportunities for student achievement or self concept. A review of the available literature supported the view of the writer. A number of scholars in the field of education have viewed ability grouping as a hinderance to academic achievement and self concept.

In addition to building self concept and enhancing academic achievement, heterogeneous grouping has provided positive student role models for low achievers, higher teacher expectations and a more rapid instructional pace (Slavin, 1988). Other scholars have observed in homogeneous classrooms that there has been higher student inattention, more teacher time spent managing students' behavior and increases their

exposure to the "contagion" of misbehavior of other low achievers (Eder, 1981; Eder & Felmlee, 1984). Nachmias (1977) and Rist (1970) have found that homogeneous, low ability classrooms communicate low expectations for students. These low expectations have often become self-fulfilling prophecies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to show a possible correlation between ability grouped and nongrouped students and their academic achievement.

### **Hypothesis**

There would be a significant difference in academic achievement between ability grouped and nongrouped students. Heterogeneous grouping within the classroom should provide additional opportunity for academic achievement.



## PROCEDURES

### Subjects

The subjects for this study were 164 fifth grade students. Approximately half of these students were members of a heterogeneous mathematics group, while the remaining students were members of a homogeneous mathematics group. The mean I.Q. score of the heterogeneous group was 105, while the mean I.Q. score of the homogeneous group was 109.

### Instruments

All students of the heterogeneous and homogeneous classrooms completed a standardized test for the purpose of measuring academic achievement. The standardized test measured achievement in areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, mathematic computation and word problems. Each section was designed to determine the students' ability to correctly respond to varied questions at his\her grade level. For the purpose of this study, the writer chose to examine the scores that reflect the students' mathematics computation skills.

### Setting

The study was conducted within eight fifth grade classrooms at Violet Elementary and Pickerington Elementary. These schools are located in the Pickerington Local School System,

Fairfield County, Pickerington, Ohio. Most families are middle-upper class. With the exception of homogeneous grouping for mathematics within four of the eight classes, the remaining classrooms are self-contained.

### **Data Collection**

Information and research data was collected from:

1. Standardized test scores
2. Articles from educational journals
3. Published educational documents
4. Computer search
5. Observations within the classroom

### **Design**

The writer utilized the scores achieved on the mathematic computation portion of a standardized test. This standardized test is administered throughout the Pickerington Local School District. The students' scores are recorded as a percentage at the national level.

### **Methodology**

Upon completion of the standardized test, the writer compared the scores earned by students of heterogeneously grouped classrooms to the scores earned by students of homogeneously grouped classrooms. These scores were then studied to determine if there was a correlation between

heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping and academic achievement.

#### **Definition of Terms**

Heterogeneous grouping - random grouping for instructional purposes

Homogeneous grouping - grouping for instructional purposes based upon academic performance

Low achievers - students who achieve below average standards at their grade level

Remedial students - students within a program to improve academic achievement

Standardized test - a uniform means of testing

#### **Results**

The results of this study was used to determine if there was a correlation between homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping and academic achievement. These findings may have provided implications for the academic structure of the classroom.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Research has clearly supported the use of heterogeneous classrooms to encourage academic achievement, positive self concept, higher teacher expectations, positive student role models and an improvement in student attention and behavior. To determine the possible validity of these findings, the writer has compared the academic achievement between heterogeneous and homogeneous mathematics classes.

While there are various views concerning the positive and negative aspects of heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping, it is necessary to review each of these in detail. It is the opinion of the writer that decisions concerning grouping for educational purposes should be made only after exploring all options.

There is limited research that will support the use of homogeneous grouping within the classroom, however these scholars feel that this method is the most effective for instruction. Reuman (1989) argues that advocates of ability grouping claim that by reducing heterogeneity in the class it is possible to increase the pace and level of instruction for high achievers and provide more review and corrective feedback

for low achievers, thereby optimizing achievement gains for most students. Reuman also suggests that ability grouping encourages high achievers to work harder to succeed and makes success more attainable for low achievers by eliminating competition with their more able classmates.

Another reason for ability grouping is suggested by Slavin (1987). While other scholars suggest that there are several reasons for grouping, Slavin suggests that the grouping plan exists to deal with one central fact: students differ in knowledge, skills, developmental stage and learning rate. If an educator is to present a lesson to a class, it seems obvious that the lesson should be on the academic level of the students. Within a heterogeneous classroom, this would not be possible.

Students' achievement expectancies are yet another argument for ability grouping. Reuman (1989) suggests that low-ability students are likely to hold low expectancies for success in a heterogeneous classroom, but they are likely to raise their expectancies for success toward an intermediate level when placed in a homogeneous classroom.

While some students' achievement expectancies are higher, Slavin (1987) argues that teachers also feel more comfortable within the ability grouped atmosphere. He states that this may be due to the fact that the planning for instruction within this setting is not as difficult or threatening as the planning that is necessary for instruction within a nonability

grouped classroom. Teachers often feel a state of panic when confronted with the idea of planning a totally individualized curriculum. Slavin also feels that instruction is much easier when it is planned for a homogeneously grouped classroom.

Several scholars feel that ability grouping is academically advantageous for all students. However, the writer believes that this type of grouping is beneficial only to high achievers, while heterogeneous grouping may benefit the majority of students. Many scholars have also supported findings that state this opinion.

While scholars argue that homogeneous grouping benefits low achievers by eliminating competition with high achievers, Slavin (1988) suggests that heterogeneous grouping offers positive examples and stimulation. Slavin also feels that homogeneous grouping is unfair to low achievers because of poor peer models, low teacher and student expectations and the slow instructional pace within these classrooms.

Educators also suggest that the role of the teacher in a heterogeneous classroom is different than that of a homogeneous classroom. Oakes (1985) has observed a higher quality of instruction in heterogeneous or high ability homogeneous classrooms. While this is apparent in heterogeneous classrooms, Eder (1981; Eder and Felmlee, 1984) has noted the opposite in low ability classrooms. She has observed higher student inattention, more frequent reading turn disruptions, and more teacher time spent managing students' behavior.

Persell (1977) and Oakes (1985) also report similar findings, and suggest some form of heterogeneous grouping. They suggest that grouping may doom children who are not in the high ability classrooms to second-class instruction.

While the role of the teacher in a heterogeneous classroom is important, the teacher's expectations for children can also be a critical component in the educational process. The writer has found that children's expectations are often a direct reflection of the teacher's expectations. Slavin (1988) feels that ability grouping tends to put low achievers into classes for which teachers have low expectations. Scholars have shown that when teachers have low expectations for children, these children will in turn have low expectations for themselves.

Scholars have also found that the teaching rate within a heterogeneous classroom is much more rapid than the teaching rate within a homogeneous classroom. Because of the rapid teaching rate, educators have noted the students' learning rate also increases. Oakes (1988) states that high-ability groups are exposed to a more rich school experience, and a more rapid teaching rate. This often leads to a higher learning and success rate for students.

Not only has Oakes (1988) noted a relationship between teaching rates and learning rates, but she has also discovered a correlation between teaching styles and academic achievement. She has found that teachers of high ability or hetero-

geneous classrooms are more enthusiastic, make instructions clearer and use strong criticism less frequently. Tasks within the classroom were often better organized and students were given more of a variety of things to do. In contrast, students who need more time to learn have been provided less time, and have fewer of the best teachers.

There are many other aspects of the classroom atmosphere that can effect the students' learning rate. In low-ability classrooms, teachers tend to be less encouraging and place more emphasis on behavior and discipline (Oakes, 1988). These teachers tend to spend more time getting students to follow directions, be on time and sit quietly. These classes are more often interrupted and have classroom environments that are less conducive to learning.

The environment within high achieving or heterogeneous classrooms is often just the opposite. More teacher time is spent in classroom oriented activities, and less time dealing with misbehavior. These classes are often seldom interrupted because of discipline, and provide environments that are more conducive to learning. The teachers of these classrooms often place an emphasis upon the learning process, and encourage students to do the same.

While self concept is a difficult concept to measure, researchers have found that the self concept of students in heterogeneous or high-ability classrooms is more positive than the self-concept of students in low ability classrooms.



Bracey (1987) has found that teachers often made students aware of group boundaries, sometimes sending low groups away from high groups or giving high groups the use of certain tables, games or materials. Bracey feels that this will eventually help produce the "Matthew effect", where the rich get richer. Over a period of time, this could lead to a positive self concept for high-ability students and a negative self concept for low-ability students. Weinstein (1976) concluded that the group to which a child is assigned has a significant effect on achievement regardless of prior performance. Not only can the students self concept decline, but achievement may also.

Research has also shown that when children are tracked according to ability, they tend to remain a victim of the tracking and perform according to the expected level. When a child is placed within a heterogeneous classroom, educators find that students become unaware of inabilities and will work harder to achieve goals. Slavin (1988) has found that several components of heterogeneous classrooms may contribute to this fact. He suggests that the presence of positive role models can be advantageous to low ability students. These positive role models are often high-ability students with well developed study skills. Low-achievers are exposed to and often work with students within heterogeneous classrooms, whereas low achievers in homogeneous classrooms do not benefit from this positive exposure.

A final issue that supports the use of heterogeneous grouping is the ability to incorporate multiple subject areas. This issue is supported by observations that the writer has made, as opposed to research completed by scholars. Having taught for several years within a Literature Based Reading program, the writer has observed the effectiveness of incorporating multiple subject areas within the curriculum. Teachers are able to combine several areas of study within one unit to utilize a holistic approach to learning. This holistic approach invites students to apply their knowledge within one academic area to a multitude of other academic areas. It is the opinion of the writer that this is a primary goal for the entire educational process.

Scholars often debate the issue of the effectiveness of heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping. Issues such as these directly affect children and their futures, and should be examined carefully before decisions are made. The primary concern of most educators when faced with decisions such as these, often tends to be centered around what will be best for the children they work with. Considering all aspects the writer believes that a heterogeneous atmosphere is not only supported by multiple scholars but more importantly provides the most positive and effective learning environment possible.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY (DESIGN)

There are several events to address when describing the procedures that were followed during the course of this study. These areas include the subjects, the sampling procedure, a description of the variable, the data gathering process, the application of data and a final analysis of the results. This description will begin with information concerning the subjects involved with the project.

The subjects were chosen primarily based upon the grade level desired for the study. These students were just beginning fifth grade, and had completed a standardized test during the spring of their fourth grade year. All of these students have been enrolled in the school district since at least their first grade year. It was important that this qualification be strictly followed so that each subject would have the same experiences in heterogeneous or homogeneous classrooms.

The sampling procedure was based primarily on the qualifications for the selection of the subjects. Permanent records were obtained for all fifth grade students. These records were then checked for the criteria specified above. When the files had been checked, there were 82 qualifying subjects from the homogeneous classroom.

Files were then obtained for heterogeneously grouped subjects. The same criteria was followed, and the first 82 qualifying subjects were used for the project. The Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) and the standardized test scores were recorded for both groups, and each subject received a student number. These numbers were assigned to keep the records of the students confidential.

The variable used within this study was the standardized test that was administered to the subjects during the spring of their fourth grade year. This test is one that is used nationally throughout many school systems. It is considered to be a reliable measure of students' academic achievement and growth. Pickerington Local School District has administered this standardized test for the past 3 years.

The standardized test consists of several sections that cover multiple academic areas. Scores are calculated for each of these sections, and are recorded on a national percentile. The scores that were utilized for this study were the scores earned on the Mathematics Computation section of the test.

The Mathematics Computation section covers a wide variety of material. All questions are based upon the students' ability to compute mathematical problems. In this section they are not required to use problem solving skills. The problems are written directly in the test booklet, and the students must then solve these problems.

The mathematical problems cover a wide variety of skill

areas. These areas include addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, decimals, measurement, and money related problems. The difficulty of the problems range from below grade level to above grade level. The teachers are to encourage students to answer all problems, even if the student must guess. As with all sections of the test, the Mathematic Computation portion is to be completed within a certain time period.

Upon completion of the test and the return of the results, the writer began the data gathering process. This process began with an examination of each students' permanent folder. Within these folders was a breakdown of the scores earned on each section of the standardized test and a record of the students' Intelligence Quotient. The Mathematic Computation scores and the I.Q. scores were recorded for the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.

When scores had been recorded, an evaluation of the most appropriate and effective means of presenting the data was completed. The data was then arranged and presented in two separate tables. One table was for the presentation of data for the homogeneously grouped students, while the other table presented the data for the heterogeneously grouped students. The mean and standard deviation was calculated and a z-test was used to determine the validity of the results.

---

Table 1  
Heterogeneous Group

<u>Student</u>	<u>Std Score</u>	<u>IQ</u>
Student 1	89	99
Student 2	32	96
Student 3	66	103
Student 4	66	93
Student 5	72	95
Student 6	65	78
Student 7	35	102
Student 8	81	121
Student 9	55	97
Student 10	48	92
Student 11	66	93
Student 12	87	129
Student 13	61	106
Student 14	65	128
Student 15	51	104
Student 16	68	113
Student 17	89	113
Student 18	68	132
Student 19	65	83
Student 20	51	91
Student 21	61	99
Student 22	83	119
Student 23	65	117
Student 24	32	99
Student 25	61	92
Student 26	65	113
Student 27	51	95
Student 28	68	87
Student 29	86	139
Student 30	48	75
Student 31	35	108
Student 32	89	117
Student 33	48	93
Student 34	32	75
Student 35	81	117
Student 36	83	109
Student 37	81	117
Student 38	55	117

<u>Student</u>	<u>Std Score</u>	<u>IQ</u>
Student 39	45	106
Student 40	32	117
Student 41	35	94
Student 42	41	102
Student 43	35	129
Student 44	32	108
Student 45	92	122
Student 46	66	126
Student 47	66	115
Student 48	66	81
Student 49	41	93
Student 50	65	100
Student 51	51	130
Student 52	51	119
Student 53	68	102
Student 54	83	98
Student 55	51	101
Student 56	68	108
Student 57	68	96
Student 58	26	71
Student 59	68	121
Student 60	87	93
Student 61	35	91
Student 62	55	89
Student 63	68	110
Student 64	65	98
Student 65	58	98
Student 66	81	132
Student 67	81	116
Student 68	75	102
Student 69	75	124
Student 70	61	86
Student 71	66	96
Student 72	48	106
Student 73	77	79
Student 74	58	109
Student 75	72	119
Student 76	81	107
Student 77	61	108
Student 78	61	89
Student 79	66	116
Student 80	87	106
Student 81	77	128
Student 82	86	95

---

Table 2  
Homogeneous Group

<u>Student</u>	<u>Std Score</u>	<u>IQ</u>
Student 1	48	121
Student 2	58	124
Student 3	32	102
Student 4	58	105
Student 5	35	85
Student 6	51	117
Student 7	72	112
Student 8	61	127
Student 9	48	121
Student 10	68	105
Student 11	23	116
Student 12	17	93
Student 13	66	129
Student 14	83	115
Student 15	58	116
Student 16	66	90
Student 17	96	132
Student 18	81	100
Student 19	66	119
Student 20	66	111
Student 21	35	103
Student 22	51	109
Student 23	51	117
Student 24	51	115
Student 25	35	95
Student 26	77	94
Student 27	35	102
Student 28	89	136
Student 29	45	87
Student 30	77	117
Student 31	48	66
Student 32	51	102
Student 33	55	106
Student 34	87	117
Student 35	32	106
Student 36	72	130
Student 37	61	112
Student 38	58	106



<u>Student</u>	<u>Std Score</u>	<u>IQ</u>
Student 39	68	110
Student 40	51	117
Student 41	58	116
Student 42	51	105
Student 43	68	108
Student 44	32	93
Student 45	83	124
Student 46	41	97
Student 47	45	119
Student 48	68	106
Student 49	90	108
Student 50	58	113
Student 51	51	109
Student 52	75	105
Student 53	17	110
Student 54	95	134
Student 55	72	93
Student 56	14	86
Student 57	72	134
Student 58	45	95
Student 59	41	106
Student 60	86	124
Student 61	51	112
Student 62	66	111
Student 63	51	76
Student 64	41	96
Student 65	35	103
Student 66	55	117
Student 67	45	113
Student 68	89	110
Student 69	66	103
Student 70	58	99
Student 71	72	91
Student 72	66	131
Student 73	45	104
Student 74	45	106
Student 75	61	111
Student 76	58	94
Student 77	89	128
Student 78	66	128
Student 79	51	106
Student 80	35	99
Student 81	65	115
Student 82	66	93

Table 3

## Mean and Standard Deviation

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	Mean	S.D.
Heterogeneous Group	62.62	16.87
Homogeneous Group	57.56	18.35

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Table 4  
Z-Test Results

$N_1$	82	$N_2$	82
$M_1$	62.62	$M_2$	57.56
$\text{Sigma}_1$	16.87	$\text{Sigma}_2$	18.35

Z-Test Value: 1.83

The data needed to complete the Z-Test was gathered and then utilized within the formula. Upon completion of this process the Z-Test value was compared within a table of Z-Test figures. The writer has found that the value obtained from this testing is critical at the .05 level. As a result, the writer has rejected the null hypothesis.

## RESULTS

### Limitations

Before comparing the results of the scores achieved from standardized testing, it is important to note characteristics about the subjects which may have affected the study results. Subjects from both schools come from a predominately upper-middle class suburban community. Within this community, an emphasis on achievement and good grades is prevalent. Both schools along with the community of parents stress the importance of self-motivated achievement.

The standardized test that was used for testing purposes may have also limited the results. The writer has assumed that this test was a valid measure of academic achievement in the area of Mathematic Computation Skills. Being a standardized test that has been administered on a national level, the writer believes that this test would provide one of the most valid measures.

The testing atmosphere may have also contributed to the outcome of the scores. The test was given to both groups on the same days, within the same testing limits and in each groups own classroom. However, there are several outside factors that may have had a direct effect on the final test scores. These factors may include unplanned interruptions, illness or fatigue on the days of testing or even a student's

inability to perform to his/her standards in test taking situations.

### **Summary of the Results**

The results of the computed findings did not seem to be affected by the possible limitations of the study. Scores for the heterogeneous group were significantly higher than the scores for the homogeneous group. The writer believes that the limitations presented were not significant enough to have altered the results of the study.

While areas such as self confidence and self concept are often difficult to measure, academic achievement , an understanding of concepts and academic performance are relatively simple tasks to measure. The results of this study show that the students of heterogeneously grouped classrooms typically excel in these areas. The writer also believes that children who are grouped heterogeneously tend to have a higher self concept and will typically expect more of themselves. These concepts have been addressed as a result of observation.

Following an evaluation of the presented information, the writer believes that a heterogeneous atmosphere is the environment that will provide the most potential for learning and personal growth. Research, along with results of similar studies, have shown that this type of environment allows for the achievement of higher academic goals, and promotes a more positive self image. As an educator, the writer believes that

these are two primary goals within the educational process. Heterogeneous grouping is yet another stepping stone to fulfilling this goal.

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