Total School Cluster Grouping & Differentiation

A Comprehensive, Research-based Plan for Raising Student Achievement & Improving Teacher Practices

Marcia Gentry &
Rebecca L. Mann

Editor:
Rachel A. Knox

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1

What Is Cluster Grouping?

An Introduction to Total School Cluster Grouping

Total School Cluster Grouping is a specific form of cluster grouping that has a research base, theoretical rationale, and model for successful implementation in schools. This book focuses on why an elementary school staff would want to consider developing a Total School Cluster Grouping program, followed by how to implement this model successfully in schools, and effective strategies for differentiating in the cluster-grouped classroom. Total School Cluster Grouping aims to

- provide full-time services to high-achieving, high-ability elementary students,
- help all students improve their academic achievement and educational self-efficacy,
- help teachers more effectively and efficiently meet the diverse needs of their students,
- weave gifted education and talent development "know-how" into the fabric of all educational practices in the school.

Prior to examining the details of the Total School Cluster Grouping Model, we will consider the model in the context of general cluster grouping and other ability grouping practices to provide you with information concerning what Total School Cluster Grouping is and what it is not.

Cluster grouping is a widely recommended and often used strategy for meeting the needs of high-achieving and high-ability students in the regular elementary classroom. Its use has gained popularity in recent years because of the move toward inclusive education, budget cuts, and heterogeneous grouping policies that have eliminated programs for gifted students (Purcell, 1994; Renzulli, 2005; State of the States, 2007).

When viewed in the larger context of school reform and extending gifted education services to more students, cluster grouping can reach and benefit teachers and students beyond those in traditional gifted programs.

Cluster grouping is generally defined as placing a group of gifted, high-achieving, or high-ability students in an elementary classroom with other students. There are many experts in the field of gifted education who recommend this approach. They often suggest a specific number of high-ability children—say, six to eight—to comprise the cluster, and they specify that the rest of the class should be heterogeneous. Further, many applications of cluster grouping are often only concerned with the identified high-ability children and what occurs in their designated classroom. Composition of and practices within the other classrooms are frequently ignored, as the perceived purpose of cluster grouping is to serve the identified children.

However, because cluster grouping places the highest-achieving students in one classroom and affects the composition of all other classrooms, it affects all students and teachers in the school. Therefore, cluster grouping should not only be viewed as only a program for gifted students, but also as a total school program. Through staff development, flexible placement, and grouping integrated with the regular school structure, cluster grouping offers a means for improving curriculum, instruction, and student achievement throughout the school.

The benefits of a thoughtfully implemented cluster grouping program include:

- challenging high achievers by placing them together in one classroom, thus enabling new talents to emerge among students in other classrooms and allowing them opportunities to become academic leaders;
- increasing the ability of all teachers to meet the individual academic needs of their students by reducing the range of student achievement levels in all classrooms;
- improving how teachers view their students with respect to ability and achievement;
- improving student achievement among students from all achievement levels;
- increasing the number of students identified as high achieving and decreasing the number of students identified as low achieving;
- extending gifted education services to more students in a school than those students identified as “gifted and talented”;
- bringing gifted education staff development, methods, and materials to all teachers in a school;

- providing full time placement and services for students identified as high achieving;
- providing a seamless fit with a continuum of gifted and talented services for students;
- helping teachers work together to plan effective differentiated curriculum and instruction for students at various levels of achievement and readiness;
- on-going student strength and ability assessment and identification;
- offering students the opportunity to grow and develop by receiving services that match their current levels of achievement in various subjects.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In educational settings across the country, meeting the needs of high-achieving students is a perpetual struggle. Staff, budget, and resource constraints frequently limit or exhaust the possibility of programming for the highest achievers. As gifted and talented programs are eliminated across the country due to the on-going struggle schools face to comply with No Child Left Behind and increased test-score accountability, parents and educators face an increased challenge of providing appropriate educational services to high-ability students who find basic standards unchallenging. Cluster grouping has experienced an increase in popularity, due largely to research findings that showed improved achievement test scores of students across all achievement levels (Gentry & Owen, 1999). District personnel across the country are searching for a way to improve student performance on tests, and cluster grouping has the potential to help them achieve this goal.

Many variations in definitions and applications of cluster grouping have been noted but three non-negotiable components consistently prevail (Gentry, 1999). First, groups of students (varying in number from three to more than ten) identified as gifted, high-achieving, or high-ability are placed in classrooms with students of other achievement levels. Second, teachers differentiate curriculum and instruction for the high-achieving students in the clustered classroom. Third, successful teachers of high-ability students have an interest or background in working with gifted students. These three components drive the success of cluster grouping and serve as the foundational touchstones for this book. In order to understand the philosophical and structural nuances of cluster grouping, one first needs to consider definitions, history, research, misconceptions, and theoretical underpinnings of such programming.

Understanding Cluster Grouping in the Context of Ability Grouping

Cluster grouping is an organizational model that should be discussed in the broader context of ability grouping. Thousands of studies on the positive and negative effects of full-time ability grouping exist. In the last decade-and-a-half, at least nine analyses of the effects of full-time grouping have been compiled (Rogers, 2002). Conflicting results, conclusions, and opinions exist regarding ability grouping. Ability grouping has been touted as both an effective means for promoting student achievement and an evil force contributing to the downfall of America's schools. However, the "real" answer lies somewhere in the middle and depends largely upon the context and application of the ability grouping. During this raging controversy, teachers are doing their best to meet students' individual needs within their classrooms. With the recent and emotional calls for full-scale elimination of ability grouping, the advent of full inclusion, the addition of few resources, increased class sizes, and increased accountability for student test-performance, many teachers have found meeting the continuum of individual students needs in the regular classroom nearly impossible. Study after study, analysis after analysis on the subject of ability grouping has yielded conflicting information on this complex topic. Yet, most researchers tend to agree that when teachers adjust their curriculum and instruction to the achievement and skill level of the child, students of all achievement levels benefit. This is the approach to achievement grouping that cluster grouping embraces.

Unfortunately, the issues and intricacies surrounding ability grouping have been continually relegated to one side of an ugly argument: ability grouping is either "bad" or "good." Neither could be further from the truth (thus the conflicting results). However, ability grouping is not an easily investigated topic, nor are answers clearly documented. This difficulty is due to the wide range of variables found in the school settings under which ability grouping should be studied if the study is to yield meaningful results. Most teachers know that what goes on within the ability grouping makes it "good" or "bad." The same can be said for whole group instruction, cooperative learning, inclusion, or resource rooms.

Research on tracking has shown that students in higher tracks benefited from this placement, but students in the lower tracks did not (e.g, Slavin, 1987a). Some researchers concluded that placing students in the higher tracks caused the poor achievement of students in lower tracks (Oakes, 1985). Logically, one must question whether this is indeed possible. How could those students not present cause anything?

Might other factors have "caused" the performance in both groups, such as the quality of the teachers, their expectations, or the curriculum? Opinions range from the belief that tracking is the cause of America's failing schools (Oakes, 1985) to conclusions that, without ability grouping, both high and low ability students would be harmed (Kulik, 2003). Renzulli and Reis (1991) explained an important delineation between tracking and ability grouping when they described tracking as "the general and usually permanent assignment of students to classes taught at a certain level," and ability grouping as "a more flexible arrangement that takes into account factors in addition to ability, and sometimes in the place of ability" (p. 31). Even so, research regarding tracking has become generalized to include all forms of ability grouping, though the terms tracking and ability grouping are not synonymous (Tieso, 2003).

Grouping Terminology Definitions

Because terms surrounding grouping are often attributed with different, conflicting definitions and because these definitions often overlap or carry emotional weight, we provide the following definitions to clarify terms used throughout this book.

General Cluster Grouping

Cluster grouping has a variety of definitions based on how it is implemented, but it can generally be defined as placing several high-achieving, high-ability, or gifted students in a regular classroom with other students and with a teacher who has received training or has a desire to differentiate curriculum and instruction for these "target" students (Gentry, 1999).

Total School Cluster Grouping (as applied by the school in the study referenced in this book)

Total School Cluster Grouping takes General Cluster Grouping several steps further to consider the placement and performance of every student in the school together with the students who might traditionally be identified as gifted and placed in the cluster classroom under the general model. The focus of this book will be on the application of Total School Cluster Grouping, which differs from general clustering in the following important ways:

- Identification occurs yearly on the basis of student performance, with the expectation that student achievement will increase as students grow, develop, and respond to appropriately differentiated curricula.

- Identification encompasses the range of low-achieving to high-achieving students, with all student achievement levels identified.
- The classroom(s) that contain clusters of high achievers contain no above-average achieving students, as these students are clustered into the other classrooms.
- Some classrooms may contain clusters of special needs students with assistance provided to the classroom teacher.
- Teachers may flexibly group between classes or among grade levels as well as use a variety of flexible grouping strategies within their classrooms.
- All teachers receive professional development in gifted education strategies and have the opportunity for more advanced education in gifted education and talent development through advanced workshops, conferences, and coursework.
- The teacher whose class includes the high-achieving cluster is selected by his or her colleagues and provides differentiated instruction and curriculum to these students as needed to meet their educational needs.

Ability Grouping

Students of similar ability are placed together in groups so that the teacher can modify the pace, instruction, and curriculum to address the needs of individual students who have different abilities in different curricular areas (Tieso, 2003). Kulik (1992) warned, "benefits are slight from programs that group children by ability but prescribe common curricular experiences for all ability groups" (p. 21). He also stressed that students from all ability levels gain when curriculum and instruction are adjusted to meet their learning needs. Ability grouping can be done by subject, within classes, or between classes, and for part of the day or throughout the day. In some applications of ability grouping, the composition of the groups changes while in others it does not.

Achievement Grouping

Similar to ability grouping, achievement grouping focuses on demonstrated levels of achievement by students. Achievement is viewed as something dynamic and changing. Like ability grouping, achievement or skill level grouping can be done by subject, within or between classes, part of the day or all day. It very often takes place in a flexible manner as performance and achievement levels of students change (Renzulli & Reis, 1997). Throughout this book we use the term "achievement

grouping" rather than the term "ability grouping" due to its more fluid and manifest definition. Ability is often equated to intelligence and viewed as latent and fixed, whereas achievement is more likely to be viewed as changeable or to be affected by effective educational opportunities. It must also be noted that high achievers inherently have high ability, whereas not all high-ability students are high achievers.

Between-class Grouping

This type of grouping occurs when students are regrouped for a subject area (usually within an elementary grade level) based on ability or achievement. Teachers instruct students working at similar levels with appropriately challenging curricula, at an appropriate pace, and with methods most suited to facilitate academic gain. For example, in mathematics one teacher may be teaching algebra to advanced students, while a colleague teaches pre-algebra to students not as advanced, and yet another teacher works with students for whom math is a struggle, employing strategies to enhance their success and understanding. Between-class grouping arrangements by subject areas usually require that grade-level teachers teach the subject at the same time to facilitate the grouping arrangements.

Within-class Grouping

Within-class grouping refers to different arrangements teachers use within their classes. Groups may be created by interest, skill, achievement, job, ability, self-selection—either heterogeneous or homogeneous—and can include various forms of cooperative-learning grouping arrangements. Flexible arrangements for within-class grouping are desirable.

Tracking

Tracking is full-time placement of students into ability groups for instruction—usually by class and at the secondary level. In a tracked system, there is very little opportunity to move between the various tracks, and placement in the tracks is often determined by some form of "objective" testing. Tracking is "the practice of grouping students according to their perceived abilities . . . the groups are sometimes labeled college bound, academic, vocational, general, and remedial" (McBrien & Brandt, 1997, pp. 97-98). Tracking has very little to do with ability or achievement grouping in elementary grades, although it has often been generalized to elementary school settings and used to discourage grouping with young children.

Flexible Grouping

Flexible grouping calls for using various forms of grouping for instruction, pacing, and curricula in a manner that allows for student movement between and within groups based on their progress and needs. Flexible grouping takes place (a) when there is more than one form of grouping used (class, project, job, skill, heterogeneous, homogeneous) and (b) when group membership, in some or all of these groups, changes according to the form of grouping used. Keep in mind that groups are formed and modified based on the academic needs of the students. Both critics and supporters of grouping agree that grouping should be flexible (Gentry, 1999; George, 1995; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Slavin, 1987b).

Table 1.1 summarizes the grouping terminology definitions.

Ability Grouping Considerations

Slavin (1987b, 1990, 2006) listed three important advantages of regrouping students for selected subjects over homogeneous ability grouped class assignments: (a) identifying and placing students in the setting for most of the day reduces labeling effects, (b) achievement in reading or math determines group placement—not ability level, and (c) regrouping plans tend to be flexible. In their meta-analyses, Kulik and Kulik (1991) reported that within-class programs specifically designed to benefit gifted and talented students raised the achievement scores of these students. Slavin (1987a) reported that within-class ability grouping had a positive effect (.34 standard deviations) on the mathematics achievements of all students, with the most positive effect for students who initially achieved at low levels. He also stated that the within-class use of grouping for reading instruction might be necessary. After reviewing the effects of 13 different research syntheses on grouping, Rogers (1991, 2002) concluded that grouping students on the basis of academic ability and on the basis of general intellectual ability has "produced marked academic achievement gains as well as moderate increases in attitude toward the subjects in which these students are grouped" (1991, p. xii). Despite many arguments for and against ability grouping, it appears from reviews of the research that grouping can help to improve the academic performance of students of all achievement levels if implemented with appropriate curriculum, instruction, and expectations.

For grouping to positively affect the academic achievement of students, more than a simple administrative grouping plan must exist. As demonstrated by the

Table 1.1. Grouping Terminology.

Term	Definition
Cluster Grouping	The placement of several high-achieving, high-ability, or gifted students in a regular classroom with other students and a teacher who has received training or has a desire to differentiate curriculum and instruction for these "target" students.
Total School Cluster Grouping	Cluster grouping model that takes into account the achievement levels of all students and places students in classrooms yearly in order to reduce the number of achievement levels in each classroom and facilitate teachers' differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all students and thus increase student achievement.
Ability Grouping	Students are grouped for the purpose of modification of pace, instruction, and curriculum. Groups can be flexible and arranged by subject, within classes, or between classes.
Achievement Grouping	Focuses on demonstrated levels of achievement by students and is viewed as something dynamic and changing. Groups can be arranged by subject, within classes, or between classes.
Between-class Grouping	Students are regrouped for a subject area (usually within an elementary grade level) based on ability or achievement. Teachers instruct students working at similar levels with appropriately challenging curricula, at an appropriate pace, and with methods most suited to facilitate academic gain.
Within-class Grouping	These groups are different arrangements teachers use within their classes. Groups may be created by interest, skill, achievement, job, ability, self-selection—either heterogeneous or homogeneous—and can include various forms of cooperative learning grouping arrangements. Groups are intended to be flexible.
Tracking	The full-time placement of students into ability groups for instruction, usually by class and at the secondary level. Little opportunity exists to move between tracks.
Flexible Grouping	The use of various forms of grouping for instruction, pacing, and curriculum in such a manner to allow for movement of students between and among groups based on their progress and needs

varied results from the meta-analytic studies on grouping, there is more to grouping than simply assigning students to groups on the basis of their ability or achievement levels. Rogers (1991) suggested it was unlikely grouping itself caused the gains. The studies that reported the largest effects were of programs that provided differentiation within ability groups (Kulik, 1992, 2003; Rogers, 1991, 2002). Kulik (2003) noted that bright, average, and low-achieving youngsters benefited from grouping programs if the curriculum was appropriately adjusted to the aptitude levels of the groups. Accordingly, he recommended schools use various forms of flexible ability grouping. In discussing their meta-analyses findings on grouping practices, Kulik and Kulik (1992) concluded:

> If schools eliminated grouping programs with differentiated curricula, the damage to student achievement would be great, and it would be felt broadly. Both higher and lower aptitude students would suffer academically from the elimination of such programs. The damage would be truly great if, in the name of de-tracking, schools eliminated enriched and accelerated classes for their brightest learners. The achievement level of such students would fall dramatically if they were required to move at the common pace. No one can be certain that there would be a way to repair the harm that would be done. (p. 73)

What the Research Says About Cluster Grouping

It is clear that a discrepancy exists between what takes place in schools for students with regard to challenge and instructional strategies and what should take place if American students are to compete in a global marketplace (Renzulli, 2005). Restricting the range of student achievement levels in classrooms results in more time for teachers to work with individual students. Cluster grouping has been found to be beneficial to students in that it allows students of similar achievement levels to work together and challenge each other. For high-ability learners, cluster grouping also allows them the opportunity to compare themselves to their intellectual peers and form a more accurate perception of their own abilities. By not always being best or first academically, they learn to work, to fail, to strive for excellence, and they have others' high quality work with which to compare their own work. These elements are essential for high-ability students to learn to work to their potential (Robinson, Reis, Neihart, & Moon, 2002).

Researchers have noted numerous benefits from grouping gifted students. These benefits include improved academic achievement (Gentry, 1999; Tieso, 2005), realistic perception of abilities when compared to peers (Marsh, Chessor, Craven, & Roche, 1995), appropriate levels of challenge (Kulik, 2003; Rogers, 2002), the ability for teachers to address unique social and emotional needs of gifted students (Peterson, 2003), and the ability for teachers to better address individual strengths and weakness with a more focused range of ability levels (Moon, 2003). Additionally, research indicates that there are several major benefits to cluster grouping:

- Gifted students regularly interact both with their intellectual peers and their age peers (Delcourt & Evans, 1994; Rogers, 1991; Slavin, 1987a).
- Cluster grouping provides full-time services for gifted students without additional cost (Gentry & Owen, 1999; Hoover, Sayler, & Feldhusen, 1993; LaRose, 1986).
- Curricular differentiation is more effective and likely to occur when a group of high-achieving students is placed with a teacher who has expertise, training, and a desire to differentiate curriculum than when these students are distributed among many teachers (Bryant, 1987; Kennedy, 1995; Kulik, 1992; Rogers, 2002).
- Removing the highest achievers from most classrooms allows other achievers to emerge and gain recognition (Gentry & Owen, 1999; Kennedy, 1989).
- Student achievement increases when cluster grouping is used (Brulles, 2005; Gentry & Owen, 1999; Pierce, Cassady, Adams, Dixon, Speirs Neumeister, & Cross, 2007).
- Over time, fewer students are identified as low achievers and more students are identified as high achievers (Gentry, 1999).
- Cluster grouping reduces the range of student achievement levels that must be addressed within the classrooms of all teachers (Coleman, 1995; Gentry, 1999; Delcourt & Evans 1994; Rogers, 1993).

Several analyses of studies regarding ability grouping in elementary schools have been completed (Kulik, 1992; Kulik & Kulik, 1984, 1985, 1992; Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, & d'Apollonia, 1996; Rogers, 1991; Slavin, 1987a); however, only ten published studies could be found that examined the effects of ability grouping on gifted students in schools where a cluster grouping model was used (Delcourt & Evans, 1994; Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell, & Goldberg, 1994; Gentry, 1999; Gentry & Owen, 1999; Hoover, Sayler, & Feldhusen, 1993; Ivey, 1965; LaRose, 1986; Long 1957; Ziehl, 1962). Eight of these studies were concerned

with the effects of cluster grouping on gifted students, and only our work examined effects on students of other achievement levels.

Although cluster grouping is commonly suggested as a programming option for gifted students, surprisingly little evidence exists regarding its effects on these students. A single study examined the effects of cluster grouping on all students and on teachers' perceptions of other students' performance (Gentry & Owen, 1999). Gentry (1999) and Gentry & Owen (1999) reported that for two entire classes (i.e., graduation years) of students, when compared to similar students in a longitudinal, quasi-experimental study, student achievement increased among all students in the cluster-grouped school. Standardized achievement scores in math, reading, and the total battery on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (Hieronymus, Hoover, & Lindquist, 1984) improved for two entire graduation years between grades two and five. Further, the cluster-grouped students began with lower total achievement than their comparison school counter parts for each graduation year of students and ended with significantly higher total achievement than the comparison school students. These achievement trends are depicted in Figures 1.1 and 1.2. The gains in achievement

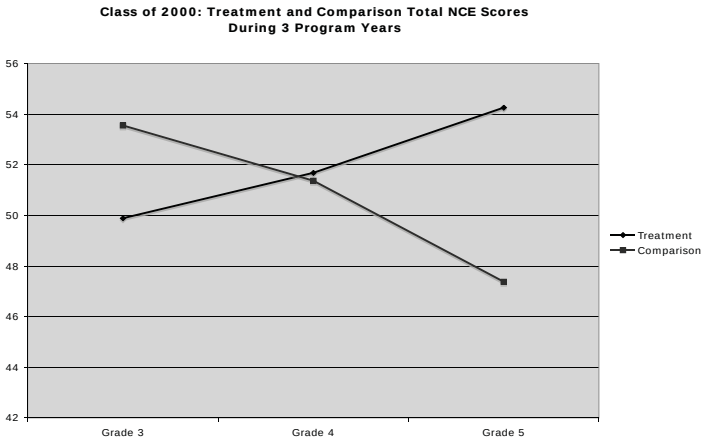

Figure 1.1. Class of 2000 treatment and comparison NCE scores during 3-program years.

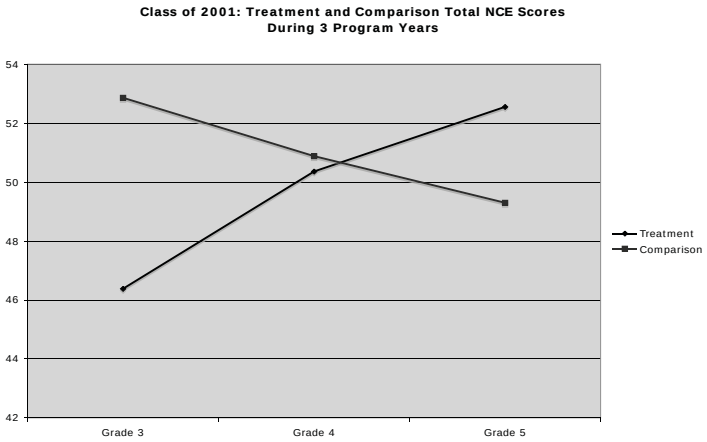

Figure 1.2. Class of 2001 treatment and comparison NCE scores during 3 program years.

and the differences in achievement were both statistically and practically significant with medium to large effect sizes.

Additionally, more students in the treatment school were identified as above average or high achievers while fewer students were identified as low achievers during the 5-year span of the study. Changes in the achievement categories are depicted in Figures 1.3 and 1.4. Gentry (1999) also reported qualitative findings concerning teacher practices, administrative leadership, and the various uses of grouping that helped to explain the achievement and identification findings.

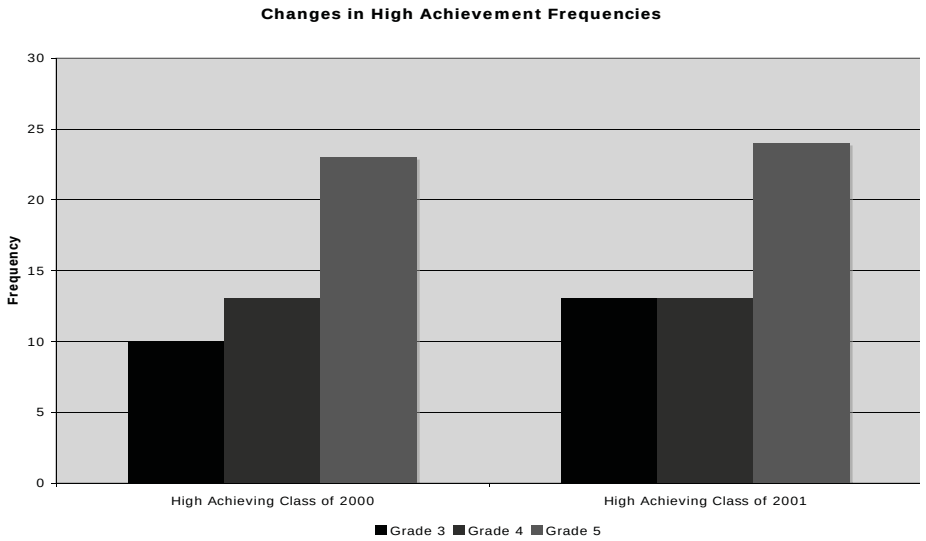

Figure 1.3. Changes in frequencies of identified high-achieving students during 3 program years.

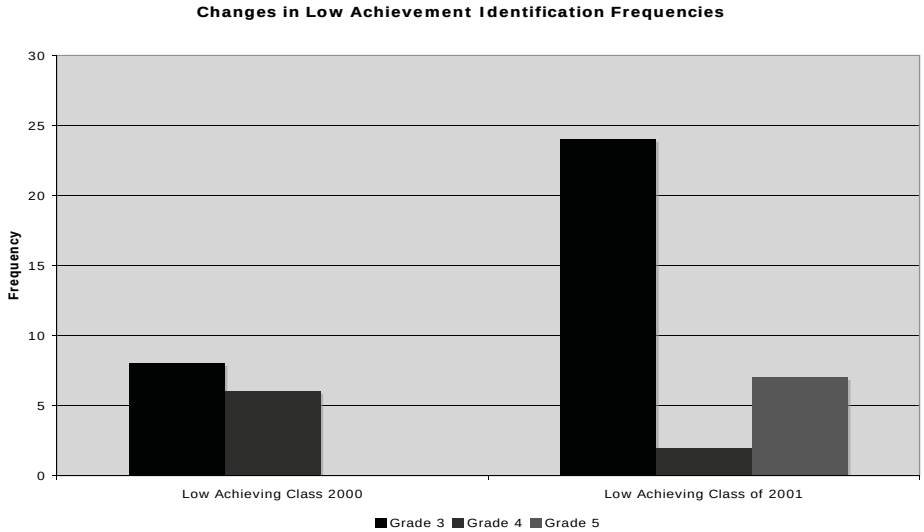

Figure 1.4. Changes in frequencies of identified low-achieving students during 3 program years.

Since this research was published, this model has been widely recommended and implemented, but most districts show little interest in publishing the results of their efforts, hence only anecdotal information exists concerning the efficacy of implementation in these varied sites (e.g., Teno, 2000). However, this study has been replicated with similar findings reported in dissertation format (Brulles, 2005) and in conference proceedings (Pierce et al., 2007), and we are currently engaged in a longitudinal replication study in Indiana. The Total School Cluster Grouping Model that we studied in the mid-1990s and that we are currently replicating serves as the conceptual basis for the remainder of this book.

Total School Cluster Grouping

Total School Cluster Grouping operates on the premise that the gifted education program will enhance the entire school. As noted by Tomlinson and Callahan (1992), Renzulli (1994), Reis, Gentry, and Park (1995), and the U.S. Department of Education (1993), the use of gifted education "know-how" has the potential to improve general education practices. The long-term study conducted by Gubbins and the NRC/GT Research Team (2002) found that by employing strategies typically used in gifted programs, academic needs were more likely to become the focus of the curriculum than the typical themed units (watermelons, apples, pumpkins) that had previously presided in many classrooms. Cluster grouping, when designed appropriately, can simultaneously address the needs of high-achieving students and the needs of other students.

The professional development component of this model had positive effects not only on the students, but the teachers also felt that they received both the instructional and collegial support that allowed them to become leaders in their schools (Gentry & Keilty, 2004). Due to the total-school effects of cluster grouping, professional development plays a critical role in the model's success. On-going staff development opportunities afforded teachers opportunities to explore instructional strategies that can be implemented successfully in cluster-grouped classrooms. Through integrating higher-order thinking skills, developing critical thinking skills, compacting curriculum, using open-ended questions, accelerating students in content areas, and using several other instructional strategies, teachers reported being able to address the specific needs of their students (Gentry & Owen, 1999). According to Teacher 3A (a third grade teacher who taught the high-achieving cluster students):

> We had so many high [achieving] math students who weren't in a cluster [for high-achieving students]. We thought, to really meet the needs of the grade level, we would have a cluster group strictly for math. We also had the high [achieving] cluster reading group to meet the needs of other children who may not have been identified or who had strengths that weren't evident across the board. We were able to target more children for high reading by regrouping within the grade level for reading. (p. 234)

The focus on the individual abilities and needs of students in the cluster groups provided more opportunities to identify students at higher levels. For example, Teacher 4C (who taught a fourth-grade class) explained:

> Maybe cluster grouping has a lot to do with it. The cluster grouping may give the lower-achieving students more self-confidence . . . I think they become more involved in class when the high [achieving] kids are removed. And you know that those high [achieving] kids are competitive and tend to dominate class sometimes. Also, the average student or high-average student really blossomed, too, which may be due to cluster grouping. (Gentry & Owen, 1999, pp.228-229)

Kulik and Kulik (1992) and Rogers (1991) suggested that grouping by ability, when used in conjunction with appropriate differentiated instruction, can be beneficial to the achievement of all students. When placed together, gifted students are given the opportunity to see the level at which their academic peers are performing. While in heterogeneous groups, these students may be able to perform at a sub-par level and still be seen as excelling beyond their classmates, when in truth they are capable of so much more (Kulik, 2003; Rogers, 2002). By grouping more homogeneously, the façade of effort and ability can be removed and replaced with more appropriate challenge and rigor.

In turn, the same phenomenon occurs in the other classrooms. Students who previously sat quietly, able to avoid participation, are now free to engage in and contribute to the learning process. As expectations are raised for all students, accountability increases, attention focuses, and productivity begins to increase. By regrouping the student population according to achievement levels, educators are better able to meet both the diverse needs of the students and the non-negotiable restrictions of the budget (Gentry, 1999).

Administrators and teachers noted the merit of Total School Cluster Grouping, as it provided positive results for both teachers and students. The teachers liked

the program, and 95% of them believed it helped them better meet the needs of the students in their classrooms (Gentry, 1999). One teacher explained how she came to view the program:

> One thing—I remember how skeptical I was at the beginning because I am not a risk-taker. I thought the same thing a few other people thought—oh, you take those top kids out and I'm not going to have any spark. And that was far from being true. I see lots of sparks in my room. . . . And having my daughter in [the program], . . . there's such a difference in her attitude and her love for school is back. . . . Before being placed in the high-achieving cluster, she wasn't being challenged in school, now to see her doing research projects as an eight-year-old. . . . She's doing projects so beyond what I ever thought, and she is so excited about school. (p. 238)

In summary Total School Cluster Grouping is a model with a growing body of research. Its use has the potential to meet the academic needs of gifted and talented students and to help all students achieve at high levels. In the next chapter we discuss Total School Cluster Grouping in detail.