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In Response

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In Response

Alice T. Clark

It is very rewarding to learn that my article in the Summer issue of the JOURNAL FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING has been seriously examined and challenged. Dr. Schmidt's response raises some provocative arguments that have caused me to do some rethinking. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to his manuscript.

Possibly through kindness, he failed to point out what I feel is the article's most glaring deficiency - the small n in the non-letter graded group. The number imbalance between the membership in the two groups studied, even though this was statistically controlled, raises serious questions about the validity or meaningfulness of the results not only for this specific population but assuredly for generalizing beyond this sample. With considerable humility I make the following observations about Dr. Schmidt's reinterpretation.

Dr. Schmidt's first point relates to the combination of CR-CD-CW students with S-U students, suggesting that the non-letter graded sample has been contaminated by variations in its members' motivation, major, typicalness, and prior counseling. Thus, he infers that any statements about the non-graded group have to be considered suspect and tentative. If this is so, then his own reinterpretation is equally suspect and tentative. However, let me provide additional data that may lend greater credibility to the non-graded group. In checking the records of the Registrar for CTL 213 enrollments in 1972-73, there were no S-U entries. Since only juniors and seniors in elementary education were allowed to enroll CR-CD-CW, it seems reasonable to assume that all the non-graded enrollments were upper classmen in elementary education.

As an aside, it is not quite as apparent to me that S-U " . . . is clearly used by students to protect GPA's. . ." or that an S-U enrollment " . . . is

an atypical student" or that S-U enrolled students have received " . . . little if any advisement as to goals and purposes for using the option." Some students may have enrolled S-U because they only wanted to enroll for one ungraded class. They may have needed to bring up grade point averages. They may have wanted to experiment on a limited basis with the non-graded concept. They may have been transferring schools or anticipating graduate programs. With no data, one set of assumptions is potentially as valid as any other.

In regard to Dr. Schmidt's second point that motivation should have been measured in terms of the degree of achievement by the student of the grade goals which he set for himself at the beginning of the class rather than by using the student's cumulative grade point average--this would beg the very question which is being raised. My point was to determine whether a student's motivation to participate and achieve in an ungraded class was any different from his motivation in his prior graded college classes. How can you assess differences between two conditions without some measure of both conditions? Since the grade earned is the measure in the first situation, it seemed only logical and consistent to use the same variable in the second condition. There is considerable support from the literature to use prior grades as a measure of motivation to perform in the classroom when I.Q. has been held constant as it was in this study. Investigating grade goals of all the students and the degree of achievement of these goals might have provided an interesting measure of aspiration, reality assessment, self knowledge, and/or even an indication of initial motivation to perform. If the student did not attain his grade goal, the investigator would be left to speculate why . . . or to redesign the study to try to learn why. That would indeed be a valid, appropriate, and interesting project but would not have answered the question which was being asked, namely, is there a difference between a student's motivation in an ungraded class and in a graded class?

I cannot quarrel with Dr. Schmidt's discussion of my research definitions. Because there are so many opinions as to what constitutes academic achievement, motivation, educational activity, etc., responsible investigators operationalize their terms to provide definitions that at least communicate clearly and concretely behavioral correlates of these abstractions and then treat their data consistently. I submit that both of these things were done.

In regard to the use of the K-S One-Sample Test rather than the K-S Two-Sample Test, I would concur that a misstatement occurred in the original article; in point of fact, a K-S Two-Sample Test was employed.

On Dr. Schmidt's discussion of the third research question, he again argues in favor of determining over and underachievement by the students relative to their attainment of their specific goals for this one course. I can only refer him to the literature where this type of study is more typically part of an aspiration level measurement. Using the student's past GPA allows the researcher to sum across many samples of completed achievement to arrive at a much broader and more reliable indication of motivation in an academic setting. To measure over and underachievement as Dr. Schmidt suggests would give a measure under the non-graded situation only. It would give no measure of prior graded achievement to be used as a comparison basis, which is the comparative analysis sought. To know whether the students achieved the grades they aimed for in this class would provide interesting additional information, and I appreciate the suggestion for future projects.

I do wish to decline any credit for one thought expressed in Dr. Schmidt's summary " . . . that the quality of CTL programs are in jeopardy." My research did not even address that topic; and though I have only anecdotal evidence to support my opinion, I would categorically deny the suggestion.

In retrospect, I find my concluding phrase, "genuine concern" communicating a stronger recommendation

than I have intended. My purpose was only to bring this subject to the attention of our faculty for their appraisal and possible use in future planning. I feel I have succeeded.