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Organic Writing Assessment: Dynamic Criteria Mapping in Action

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Dynamic Criteria Mapping

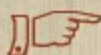


ORGANIC WRITING

Assessment



in Action



Bob Broad
Linda Adler-Kassner
Barry Alford
Jane Detweiler
Heidi Estrem
Susanmarie Harrington
Maureen McBride
Eric Stalions
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ORGANIC WRITING ASSESSMENT

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Dynamic Criteria Mapping in Action

**BOB BROAD
LINDA ADLER-KASSNER
BARRY ALFORD
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CONTENTS

- 1 Organic Matters: In Praise of Locally Grown Writing Assessment 1
Bob Broad
- 2 The Journey is the Destination: The Place of Assessment in an Activist
Writing Program—Eastern Michigan University 14
Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem
- 3 DCM as *the* Assessment Program: Mid Michigan Community
College 37
Barry Alford
- 4 Designs on Assessment at UNR: University of Nevada, Reno 52
Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride
- 5 Assessment Changes for the Long Haul: Dynamic Criteria Mapping
at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis 75
Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden
- 6 Putting Placement on the Map: Bowling Green State
University 119
Eric Stalions
- 7 Bookend 154
Bob Broad
- References* 160
- Index* 164
- About the Authors* 166

1

ORGANIC MATTERS

In Praise of Locally Grown Writing Assessment

Bob Broad

In his book *Organic Matters* (2001), farmer Henry Brockman criticizes the USDA definition of “organic” (grown without chemical pesticides or synthetic fertilizers) as dangerously weak. He points out that most commercially grown organic produce purchased at grocery stores lacks flavor and nutrition just as much as most commercially grown non-organic produce. Both these kinds of food are produced industrially with the goal of high yields, and with similar costs to the environment, to the flavor and nutritional value of the produce, and ultimately to consumers.

In other words, what Michael Pollan (2006) calls “industrial organic” agriculture enacts nearly (but not quite) as dramatic an abandonment of the human values and purposes of farming as does the dominant form of industrial agriculture, which also uses pesticides and petro-chemical fertilizers. Both forms of industrial farming ultimately fail to preserve or protect the land, and both fail to nourish the customer optimally; and both fail for the same reason: the pursuit of greater profits.

Brockman argues for (and practices) a tougher, more comprehensive standard of organic agriculture. This higher standard requires farmers to protect the ecosystem, select plant varieties for nutrition and taste rather than appearance and durability, and establish direct farmer-to-consumer connections through farmers’ markets and Community Supported Agriculture co-operatives like those through which Brockman sells his produce. In my favorite passage from his slim book, he lays out the unanswered questions that prevented him from ever eating an organic tomato, imported from South America, brought to him by his sister one winter day a few years ago.

How could I [eat it]? I knew nothing about that tomato. . . . [Its] life history was a cipher to me. Who planted it? Who picked it? What kind of soil was it grown in? How was it fertilized? Irrigated? How many people had touched it on its long journey to my kitchen counter? How long had it sat in a box? Was the hangar, plane, truck, warehouse, cooler it sat in fumigated with noxious chemicals? How much fuel had been burned on its way from a field in Chile to

my counter in Congerville [Illinois]? I had no idea what the answers to all these questions might be. This tomato was just too far removed from me and my life for me to eat. (Brockman, 1)

If the tomato comes from too far away for him to know its story, if the circumstances of its production and delivery to his home are, in Brockman's words (echoing Emmanuel Levinas's [1987] ethical philosophy) overwhelmingly "faceless," then Brockman would simply rather do without it altogether—even on a cold, tomato-barren December day.

Among educational leaders and reformers, the phrase "learning culture" is now commonplace (Shepard 2000). As educators, we nurture and grow our students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions. We carefully tend the learning environment, and we provide our students with the best resources available to nourish their curiosity, understanding, and active participation in democratic citizenship. Among those of us interested particularly in assessment, we strive to create "assessment cultures" (Huot 2002) in which educators integrate their evaluations into teaching and learning (and vice versa) and match their assessment methods with best instructional practices (and vice versa).

Of course not everyone favors this "home gardening" approach to learning and evaluation. As this book goes to print, commercial testing corporations are eagerly inviting us to out-source writing (and other) assessments to their computerized systems (Ericsson and Haswell 2006). Note, for example, this recent postcard from the Educational Testing Service: "How long does it take you to evaluate an essay? Instantly . . . using Criterion™ Online Writing Evaluation . . ." (One's imagination flashes irresistibly to a hard, pale, joyless, imported tomato.) Or consider this subject line in a recent e-mail message from another evaluation corporation: "Faculty Unburdened: Assessment Made Simple in 5 Steps." Many of us feel troubled by such fast-food-style offers to make assessment faster and simpler by splitting it off from the rest of our work as educators. In such a climate, we need to recall and listen to other voices urging us to re-capture, re-coup, and harness organic, localized assessment to nourish productive teaching and learning.

In 1989, Egon G. Guba and Yonna S. Lincoln published their book *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Making good on the promise to their readers of a book "dramatically different from any other book about evaluation that you have ever read" (7), the authors issue a manifesto for a revolution in evaluation as a scholarly discipline and as an institutional practice. Though the paradigmatic and philosophical basis for—and performance of—this revolution is complex, one feature of it clearly marks it as a precursor to the evaluative approaches illustrated in the book you are now

reading. Guba and Lincoln emphasize that the methods and findings of their evaluative system “are inextricably linked to the particular physical, psychological, social, and cultural contexts within which they are formed and to which they refer” (8). The authors go on to insist that much of the positive value of fourth generation evaluation comes precisely from the *impossibility* (their word—and their italics) of generalizing its methods and findings—which are focused on achieving a negotiated, value-pluralistic, site-specific consensus—across dissimilar contexts.

The consensus [achieved] is the product of human conceptual exchange in a *particular* setting; it is thus unlikely that this same consensus would necessarily help other persons make sense of *their* settings. (Guba and Lincoln, 8, emphasis original)

Guba and Lincoln adamantly oppose the importation of evaluative methods or findings across institutions or cultures. Their fourth generation evaluation is a militantly local, organic assessment practice.

Seven years after Guba and Lincoln’s call to evaluative rebellion, Pamela Moss (1996) extended a more moderate and inclusive invitation to those in educational assessment to open our minds to

less standardized forms of assessment that honor the purposes teachers and students bring to their work . . . [and] the complex and subtle ways that assessments work within the local contexts in which they are developed and used. (Moss 1996, 20)

Moss reinforces the democratizing spirit of her call for home-grown assessment by invoking the classic ethnographic imperative to “understand what the actors—from [their] own point of view—mean by their actions” (21). Moss explains how ethnographers use the term “emic” to refer to interpretations offered by participants in a particular context or culture, as distinct from the “etic” interpretations typically offered by outsiders and experts. The next generation of educational measurement, Moss insists, needs to privilege emic meanings and values.

Richard Haswell’s collection *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction within a University Writing Program* (2001) is also rich with calls for healthful alternatives to industrial and commercial writing assessment:

All good assessment is local (xiv)

Our moral is that writing teachers should be leery of assessment tools made by others, that they should, and can, make their own (14)

Everywhere people will prefer known brands to locally grown assessments (39)

Haswell's book urges us to steward the distinctive "climate," "ecology," and "ecosystem" (62, 67) of assessment and learning in our organizations.

One of the strongest voices promoting home-grown assessment culture can be heard in Brian Huot's *Re-Articulating Writing Assessment* (2002). At one point, Huot puts it this simply: "we need to use our assessments to aid the learning environment for both teachers and students" (8). In the chapter "Toward a New Theory for Writing Assessment," Huot offers his now-familiar list of five features characterizing the newly emerging paradigm in writing assessment, four of which precisely match farmer Brockman's core values: site-based, locally controlled, context-sensitive, and accessible.

The co-authors of the present volume carry forward this quest for locally produced writing assessment. In describing the dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) project faculty undertook at Mid Michigan Community College, Barry Alford gives a slightly different twist—and name—to organic assessment culture: he calls it "smart assessment."

What I find most attractive about [DCM] is that it fits my sense of "smart" assessment, assessment that makes the context, environment, or institution smarter and more reflective. (personal communication)

In similar terms, Eric Stalions speaks of the "symbiotic relationship" his participants at Bowling Green State University envisioned between placement assessment and course-based teaching and learning: each endeavors to help the other grow and thrive. Symbiotic, smart, organic, and locally grown: those are the qualities we seek in our assessments.

The unanswerable questions ("Who planted it? Who picked it? Will it satisfy and nourish the eater?") that left Henry Brockman's long-distance tomato sitting uneaten on his kitchen counter are the same questions that lead Guba and Lincoln, Moss, Haswell, Huot, Alford (2007), Stalions (this volume), and many others in the field of writing assessment to reject generic, faceless, commercialized, off-the-shelf assessments and instead to grow their assessment cultures locally and (by Brockman's rigorous definition) organically.

THIS BOOK'S ROOTS

In *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing* (2003), I presented a critique and proposal that carried forward the relatively young tradition of local and organic assessment culture described above. I argued that, despite the significant benefits of traditional rubrics, they are too simple and too generic to effectively portray the educational values of any specific classroom, department, or program. As an alternative, I urged colleagues in composition and rhetoric to implement a process called dynamic criteria mapping (DCM).

Inspired by Guba and Lincoln's *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989) and Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory (1967), the DCM approach promotes inductive (democratic) and empirical (ethnographic) methods for generating accurate and useful accounts of what faculty and administrators value in their students' work. Educators, I claimed, have ethical, civic, and professional obligations to discover, negotiate, record, and publish the values underlying their teaching and evaluation. Finally, I argued that both the inductive and empirical characteristics of DCM made it a process superior to that by which traditional scoring rubrics are developed, and so I called DCM the necessary next step beyond rubrics in the evolution of assessment.

In the closing chapter of that book, I predicted that DCM would yield six distinct professional benefits for faculty and administrators:

- Improve student learning
- Provide drama, excitement, and surprise (for faculty participants)
- Boost pedagogical and evaluative self-awareness
- Improve teaching and assessment
- Increase validity and truthfulness
- Promote buy-in (especially by non-tenure-line instructors)

I ended my book with an invitation to readers to move beyond traditional assessment practices that over-simplify learning, teaching, and assessment, and to "embrace the life of things."

Early reviewers of the book were unsure, however, whether or how to accept these invitations, whether to enter the embrace. (The following analysis of the reception of *What We Really Value* is adapted directly from Chapter 2 of Stalions 2007.) White (2004) and Johnson (2004) were the most skeptical. White described DCM as "impressive" yet also "rather daunting" and "impractically complicated" (115). Johnson dismissed DCM as "too much work" (184) for writing program administrators.

Others saw more potential in the proposed methods. Strauch (2004) and Durst (2006) saw DCM as a new approach that would mark the end of rubrics altogether. Eliason (2004) and Beason (2005) cast DCM slightly differently, both using the term "alternative" to describe its relationship to traditional assessment methods. Kalikoff (2004), meanwhile, called DCM a "claim for alternative twenty-first century assessment."

One of the most interesting patterns of response concerned the relationship reviewers perceived between DCM and traditional rubrics. Myers (2003) saw DCM as a "new rubric," and Belanoff and Denny (2006) also described the outcome of the DCM process as another kind of rubric, albeit one "that will be applicable only within the context in which it is created"

(135). The co-authors contributing to the book you are now reading struggled with exactly this concern: whether their processes and outcomes were enough unlike rubrics to qualify as dynamic criteria maps. At the conclusion of this introductory chapter, I offer my reflections on their quandary.

While the various reviewers of *What We Really Value* reported feeling skeptical, interested, puzzled, anxious, inspired, or blasé, the co-authors of the current volume gathered the will and invested the time and energy to actually put DCM to use. They found my analyses, suggestions, and claims inviting and provocative enough that they adapted the DCM process to their distinctive purposes, needs, contingencies, and contexts. In the following chapters, they explore and discuss what they discovered and achieved when they carried out the second and third generations of dynamic criteria mapping in their college and university writing programs (see “The First Three Generations of DCM Application” in Stalions 2007). In my judgment, their discussions provide solid evidence to validate and confirm several, though perhaps not all, of my hopes and claims for DCM. You, the readers, will judge for yourselves. Meanwhile, and more important, the contributors to this volume generated exciting new insights of their own regarding home-grown, inductive assessment.

In 2002, in reviewing the manuscript of *What We Really Value*, Susanmarie Harrington quoted Marge Piercy’s poem “To Be of Use” and predicted that the forthcoming book would prove useful to those concerned with the healthfulness of the relationship between teaching and assessing writing. In the prologue to the book published the following year (2003), I turned Susanmarie’s blessing back onto the readers of the book as a benediction for the work I hoped they might do with it. As the book’s author, I had little power to determine whether and how DCM would be put to use in the world. Only the contributors to this book—along with others not included here, who are putting DCM into action in yet more settings and more ways—could make Susanmarie’s prediction come true. I am grateful to them all for launching their DCM projects and for studying and reporting on those projects to create this book.

At the following five institutions (presented alphabetically by co-authors’ last names), this book’s contributors adapted, enacted, and innovated on theories and strategies about which they had read in *What We Really Value*.

<i>Local DCM leaders /co-authors of this book</i>	<i>Institutions</i>
Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem	Eastern Michigan University (EMU)
Barry Alford	Mid Michigan Community College (MMCC)

Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride	University of Nevada, Reno (UNR)
Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden	Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI)
Eric Stalions	Bowling Green State University (BGSU)

Below are brief sketches of the institutional and scholarly contexts in which each co-author (or team of co-authors) conducted their DCM projects.

Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem, Eastern Michigan University

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) is a comprehensive university of about 24,000 (about 22,000 of whom are undergraduates) located in south-east Michigan. From 2000-2006, Linda and Heidi coordinated the first-year writing program (Linda still serves as Director of First-Year Writing at EMU while Heidi has moved to Boise State University). Within the first-year sequence, English 121, the targeted course for the DCM-based assessment project, is the second and most research-intensive writing course. It is also the required general education writing course on campus, taken by about 97 percent of incoming students. Linda and Heidi used DCM as part of their community-based program assessment because it gave them a way to articulate shared values while making those same values visible and public.

Barry Alford, Mid Michigan Community College

Mid Michigan Community College (MMCC) is one of twenty-eight independent community colleges in Michigan. It has an enrollment of roughly 4,000 students, and is a comprehensive community college, meaning it offers technical, health, and occupational programs along with transfer options. This project covered the entire credit-bearing range of those offerings and involved all the full-time faculty at the institution. MMCC tried DCM in order to ground their assessment program, which covered diverse areas of study, in a common language of what instructors thought students should learn and faculty should value.

Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride, University of Nevada, Reno

The University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) is a midsize land grant institution and the state's research flagship. The Core writing program, a part of the university's vertically-integrated core curriculum, was the site where DCM was adopted and adapted to develop an assessment project focused on "effective writing" and "critical thinking" in English 102, the required first-year writing course. Jane Detweiler, the Core writing program administrator, led an assessment team that included co-author Maureen McBride and several other graduate student interns. They used DCM to develop an

approach that drew from previous portfolio assessment projects (which had not focused specifically on critical thinking as such), provided rigorous quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the program's effectiveness at pursuing its stated outcomes, and engaged their teaching community in reflection on our shared pedagogical practice.

Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden, Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)'s writing program serves more than 6,000 students each year at a comprehensive urban university. The program coordinates six different introductory writing courses and provides professional development for part-time and full-time writing faculty. Their traditions and practices date from a time when most students were older commuting students and almost all instructors were part-time faculty whose amazing volunteerism created curricula and infrastructure. Recent changes in the nature of the student body (now mainly younger students) and the faculty (now predominantly full-time, non-tenure track, although a substantial number of part-time faculty remain) changed the program's culture. Despite many positive changes, it was clear that some dynamism had been lost. IUPUI looked to DCM to help them navigate through an important moment of change in their teaching culture. Working together to meet institutional needs, they used DCM to engage their faculty in collaborative research, simultaneously solving a local problem and extending scholarly inquiry. (Susanmarie recently took a new position at the University of Vermont.)

Eric Stalions, Bowling Green State University

Located in Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University (BGSU) serves approximately 23,000 students through 200 undergraduate majors and programs, 64 master's degree programs, and 17 doctoral programs. This DCM study was situated within the General Studies Writing Program, a well-established, independent writing program. DCM was used to identify, analyze, and map the rhetorical values or criteria that guided placement program evaluators in placing students into one of the first-year writing courses in 2006. The purposes of the study were: 1) to strengthen the relationship between the placement program's communal writing assessment practices and the writing program's curriculum, and 2) to provide a general heuristic with which writing program administrators could investigate the evaluative criteria of their placement programs' rhetorical assessment practices.

• •

While the current book focuses specifically on the interplay among DCM projects at these five colleges and universities, our field is also starting to hear about DCM-inspired studies conducted at a variety of other institutions, including Illinois Wesleyan University, the University of Washington Tacoma, Roanoke College (Salem, VA), Texas State University-San Marcos, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The co-authors of this book salute and cheer all those doing similar work elsewhere, and we look forward to reading their accounts of how and why they tried DCM in their contexts, and with what results.

What follows is my sketch of several themes I observed running through the discussions in the chapters that follow.

HOME-GROWN, DO-IT-YOURSELF WRITING ASSESSMENT

As you will discover as you read this book, one of the strongest themes in the following accounts of DCM projects was the high value that these co-authors—and colleagues at their institutions—placed on the home-grown, do-it-yourself qualities of the process. In an e-mail message, Eric Stalions (DCM researcher at Bowling Green State University) wrote that

Composition scholarship seems to be dominated still by theoretical arguments for locally-contextualized assessments. Our book, I think, will infuse real-life applications into future theoretical discussions . . .

Barry Alford, Faculty Assessment Chair at Mid-Michigan Community College, echoes Stalions's excitement about how important it is that these DCM efforts were (and are) grounded in the histories and people that make each institution unique:

We have been able to engage most of the faculty in the dialogue about our students. It is important that they (the faculty) see this as specific to our students and our institution. This isn't about national norms or general definitions of students. This is about the people in our classes and the problems they bring in the door with them. I don't think that fact can be overemphasized. Faculty are willing, in a way they never were before, to engage in the dialogue because it's about them and their students.

Alford ties faculty investment in professional development and evaluative inquiry to exactly the same home-grown qualities celebrated by Brockman, Guba and Lincoln, Haswell, Moss, and Huot. Alford goes on to observe that he and his colleagues

wanted assessment to be grounded in real student work and not inferred from published instruments normed in populations of students that did

not mirror our own for institutions that our students did not attend. (see Chapter 3)

Describing their innovations at the University of Nevada, Reno, Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride speak of the “organic” character of the process they undertook, and they see that feature of the process yielding an enhanced sense of ownership by UNR writing instructors.

It is the organic nature of DCM that we applied in our assessment design process. We have basically produced a non-traditional rubric, but this is what came from the instructors in the program. And they own the rubric. (see Chapter 4)

At IUPUI, meanwhile, Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden noted that

Dynamic criteria mapping seemed the best way to articulate the conflicts we saw brewing in our program, conflicts that wouldn’t come out in the open so long as we had a traditional rubric that stood in the way of unauthorized assumptions about writing. (see Chapter 5)

The documents Detweiler and McBride (at UNR) and Harrington and Weeden (at IUPUI) produced with their colleagues looked more like traditional rubrics than they had planned or expected, but the rubricity or non-rubricity of the results was not of prime importance. Foremost for them was that the values recorded there were, more than ever before, true to their respective programs and to the particular communities of faculty and students who work within them.

Localness, groundedness, and reverence for the nuances of context comprised one powerful theme in what these assessment leaders and their colleagues valued in their DCM experiences. Another dimension of DCM shared by several of this book’s co-authors seems at first at odds with the locally grown quality just discussed. They found that careful, grounded discussion of local particulars created a language by which they could make connections *across* contexts that were formerly difficult to link.

CREATING CONNECTIONS ACROSS CONTEXTS

At the time of their DCM collaboration, Heidi Estrem and Linda Adler-Kassner worked together at Eastern Michigan University. As they explain in their project report, they used DCM to help bring to light how first-year writing faculty and stakeholders from across campus valued students’ writing. Even with all their emphasis on the primacy of specificity and “place” (inspired by the work of Anis Bawarshi 2006), Adler-Kassner and Estrem nevertheless found themselves in a position to make important observations that transcended the specific.

In the focus groups, we made the somewhat paradoxical discovery that asking participants to ground their discussions of qualities associated with good writing in specific “places” allowed us to make connections between and among those stories to more general qualities. (see Chapter 2)

Likewise, Barry Alford, in his multi-disciplinary DCM project, found that the study of “real student work” authored by “our [MMCC] students” produced a lexicon with which faculty across the curriculum could discuss not only assessment, but also curriculum, teaching methods, and other issues around which they had not previously been able to converse. In Alford’s words, their DCM efforts allowed MMCC faculty for the first time

to bridge gaps between disciplines and between programs that have few, if any, common educational goals. (see Chapter 3)

These researchers found that through their locally grounded DCM processes, they moved from the authentic particulars of their teaching-learning contexts into a language and a sphere in which disparate colleagues could converse, connect, and collaborate in new ways.

“TO BE OF USE”: ADAPTATION TO LOCAL REALITIES ENACTS AND PROTECTS THE SPIRIT AND IDEALS OF DYNAMIC CRITERIA MAPPING

As you, our readers, prepare to venture forth and find inter-connections and themes of your own among the DCM projects described herein, allow me to point out one more commonality. In several of the accounts presented here, you will find co-authors worrying over whether their methods of conducting DCM events were “true” (or true enough) to DCM as described in the book *What We Really Value*. Harrington and Weeden, for example, started out adamant that they were moving beyond rubrics, and that they needed maps (hopefully replete with circles and squares, like the maps I drew of City University’s rhetorical values). However, their faculty were equally adamant in their anticipation of “the new rubric.”

Our colleagues have tolerated our foray into DCM, but they’re not much interested in the maps Scott produced. . . . “Where’s the rubric?” they kept saying. (see Chapter 5)

The outcome of this ideological and political dialectic was the IUPUI “unrubric,” which discusses levels of performance (the feature of rubrics the instructors considered necessary) but also highlights fresh, detailed language about what qualities truly characterize successful writing at IUPUI (the heart of what DCM demands).

Detweiler and McBride, at the University of Nevada, Reno, felt pressure from another direction that drove them toward a less complicated, more useable, and more portable representation of programmatic writing values than what they believed “true” DCM called for. They needed a representation that would not only enhance classroom and program-level practices, but that would also be meaningful and persuasive to directors and deans “up the food chain.” In creating the UNR star, which lays out six levels of performance in nine areas (plus two narrative-only areas of evaluation), the DCM leaders at UNR created an assessment tool that met the needs of both these very different audiences.

Along the way, these DCM explorers worried about whether the adaptations and compromises they made were “legitimate” in relation to DCM praxis as I had presented and proposed it in the 2003 book. My response to this concern brings us back to the beginning of this process, to the beginning of my earlier book, and to Piercy’s poem “To Be of Use.”

I can conceive of projects that might lay claim to the name “DCM” but that do not merit that description. For example, I once watched as a small group of English teachers took the rich, complex chart of values generated over the course of several months of discussions among their colleagues from across the curriculum and collapsed those values into the same old generic, pre-fabricated rubric presented as part of the statewide impromptu writing test. These few teachers decided they did not want “to re-invent the wheel” and that the off-the-shelf rubric adequately encapsulated the local, textured values their colleagues had worked so hard to illuminate and articulate. So yes, there is such a thing as DCM gone wrong, DCM not worthy of the name.

However, none of the projects in this book risks such censure from me or anyone. Every one of these five projects was deeply committed to the ideals and principles driving DCM as I envisioned and enacted it. Equally important, every project was also loyal to the people, histories, contingencies, and nuances of their local and momentary contexts. They found ways to “accommodate reality” (in Harrington and Weeden’s phrase) while also transforming it. Their deep loyalty to both the axiological and rhetorical idealism driving *What We Really Value* and the gritty, everyday realities of their local working contexts is what makes the contributors to this book not only “legitimate” practitioners of DCM but also pioneers of the next generation of praxis in large-scale writing assessment and faculty professional development.

All this liberal-minded congeniality does not mean that, over a friendly cup of coffee, I might not pose to some of my co-authors some challenging questions. For example, I might ask why in some cases evaluative criteria were gathered not empirically, from discussions of actual assessment decisions on specific student texts, but rather speculatively, from

what people believed and were aware of valuing. Or, I might wonder wistfully about relationships *among* criteria, that rare but informative insight that some maps provide and others do not. I would offer such questions not to discourage or censure any users of DCM, but rather to push them toward more rewarding results.

In fact, readers who re-visit the final chapter of *What We Really Value* will see that these co-authors' departures, adaptations, and innovations to meet local needs are not only allowed, but required by DCM as originally envisioned. I feel grateful to all colleagues (contributors to this book and others) who have put DCM into action, who have brought it to fruition in their classrooms, institutions, and organizations. I believe their projects make us better pedagogically, ethically, and professionally.

2

THE JOURNEY IS THE DESTINATION

The Place of Assessment in an Activist Writing Program—Eastern Michigan University

Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem

LOCAL CONTEXT

Eastern Michigan University is a comprehensive university of about 24,000 (about 22,000 of whom are undergraduates). Our students typically come from southeastern Michigan and northwestern Ohio. They come to EMU for a variety of reasons—proximity to their homes, cost (we’re fairly inexpensive, as colleges and universities go), friends who have come here before, or because they want to be teachers and we’re well-known as a “teacher training” school. (EMU started as the Michigan Normal School in 1849.)

When we were both at EMU, we were director and associate director of first-year writing, respectively. (Linda remains director of first-year writing.) The first-year writing program actually “hosts” two first-year courses (English 120, Composition I: Reading and Writing the College Experience and English 121, Composition II: Research and Writing the Public Experience) and one second-year course (English 225, Writing in a Changing World). Overall, we run about 190 courses a year in the program. About 100 of those (give or take) are sections of English 121, which is also the required, general education writing course on our campus. About 97 percent of all incoming students take the course.

Our dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) work is linked to a programmatic assessment of English 121. In 2003, we surveyed students at the beginning and end of the course to determine their degree of confidence in their learning outcomes. We also asked them to comment on the usefulness of English 121 with respect to future coursework. We learned a lot from the results about what students thought was working—the results were generally very positive—and about where to focus professional development efforts in the first-year writing program.

When we presented the results to the then-dean, her response—which we’ll discuss shortly—led us to think about other assessment models and became the impetus for the project we describe in this chapter. About the same time that we had the conversation with the dean which provoked this

work, we both read Brian Huot's *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment* (2002), and then Bob Broad's book (2003) shortly after that. Both books influenced our thinking as we considered how to design an assessment process that would move us toward several goals. We are both fascinated by (and always learn a lot from) the process of writing, research, and discovery, so we knew that we wanted a rich, multi-layered, process-based assessment. Second, we were conscious that the process itself could be a way to continue to make visible the work of first-year writing students in various ways across campus. Third, we wanted the *results* of the assessment to provide meaningful information for several groups: students themselves, instructors within our first-year writing program, and various constituencies across the campus and community.

As we wrestled with the issues Huot outlines for writing assessment and considered DCM in that context, we came up with a different approach to programmatic assessment that would not only help us learn about what others thought, but would also involve others in the conversation about writing and writers. This worked for us on a lot of levels. Of course, it would address the dean's question. But it also was consistent with one of our program's most important goals, to affect conversations about writing and writers on our campus in lots of different ways.

ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAMMATIC CHANGE

In the last ten years, work in composition studies has focused the field's attention on the importance of "place" to writing and teaching writing. For writing program administrators, this focus provides us with ways to consider how local exigencies shape writing instruction. Three questions stemming from place-based work others have done permeate the assessment project, described in this chapter:

- How have composition theorist-practitioners imagined the spaces of writing, writers, and writing instruction? (Reynolds 1998, 14)
- How can a focus on the relationship between genre conventions and practices and the specific contexts in which genres function affect approaches to understanding and teaching writing? (Russell 1997; Devitt 2004; Bawarshi 2006)
- What are the relationships among approaches to writing (including writing instruction) and specific contexts? (W. Smith 1993; O'Neill 2003; Huot 2002; Broad 2003)¹

1. These questions have long antecedents in approaches to the study of literacy practices (composition, linguistics, education) that are rooted in cultural critique (e.g., Volshinov, Bakhtin, Gramsci, Hall, Fairclough as they have been employed by Barton and Hamilton, Gee, Street, Bloom, and Selfe and Hawisher, among others), as well.

When we came to EMU in the fall of 2000, we were both acutely attuned to the nature of writing as a situated act enacted in and through the values and ideologies of contexts in which the writing is situated. In light of this valuing of context, when we collaborated with our first-year writing program colleagues to redesign the curriculum for EMU's two first-year writing courses, we put "place" squarely at their core. In both courses, as in the first year writing program more generally, we wanted students, instructors, and other program stakeholders to think carefully about the function of various genres in various places; to think critically and actively about how to identify and consciously enact conventions of genres; and to consider the implications of participating in those practices as writers and readers.

Four years later, we had developed a considerably more robust conception of the relationships between space and both writing instruction and writing assessment. This conception played out in multiple ways in our program assessment, but the journey toward this realization began with the conversation in our dean's office.

The scene

College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office, Fall 2003. Linda, Heidi and Russ (English department head) are meeting with the dean to discuss with her the results of an indirect assessment of English 121, EMU's second semester composition course. This course is taken by about 95 percent of first-year students.

The relevant dialogue

Linda: You'll see in this report that students' confidence levels with all but the technology-related outcomes for English 121 increased substantially, and at statistically significant levels, from the beginning to the end of the course. This assessment also points us to some areas where we need to focus professional development within the program—on reading-related issues, and on technology.

Dean: This is great. But this is what students say. What about other people?

This question, posed to us by our then-dean, is one that teachers have heard before: "Sure—students say they've improved, but what do *their* opinions matter? What do outside experts say?"

As much as we chafed at this question, we saw it then (as now) as legitimate and important. We might take it on its face: "What *do* other (outside/non-student/'experts') say about student work?" This question drives many direct assessments, especially those done by raters outside of writing programs. However, we could turn the question a bit and ask: What do people say about the (quality of) student work? Furthermore, what do people say

Linda and Heidi's work offers such a simple solution to a perennial writing program administrator (WPA) complaint: "They" (students, administrators, parents, colleagues) don't understand what we do in the writing program. Where do "they" get their ideas about writing from, especially if we don't offer much information to the public about what we do? The EMU writing program's willingness to interact with outsiders opens up the chance for it to set the agenda for conversations about writing (literally and metaphorically). If we don't help others see what we know about writing, we can't complain when we are misunderstood. *Harrington and Weeden*

about the qualities *in* written work, and how are those *related to* qualities in other work not created by students? This latter pair of questions reflects a more robust and developed concept of "validity" that is grounded in the same issues of space that we describe above. This conception of validity (in and through space) is developed by Brian Huot (2002) in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment*. "Including theoretical input about the complexity and context necessary to adequately represent written communication as part of the validity process," Huot argues, "gives writing teachers and writing program administrators a real say about not only the ways in which student writing is assessed, but also in the ways it is defined and valued" (52).

In the Fall of 2004, after reading Huot's book, we began to think about a place-based assessment, one that would not only involve learning "what other people would say about student work" but would also contextualize the assessment in qualities of "good writing" in our local (institutional) context. We wondered what assessment process might address the multiple, overlapping goals and principles of:

- Creating more opportunities on campus for positive conversations about student writing
- Continuing to extend already-public conversations about writing on our campus—built through existing programs and initiatives (our own program, writing across the curriculum, the Eastern Michigan Writing Project) that stretch across populations and contexts
- Designing a process that generated both qualitative and quantitative data, for a variety of purposes, including professional development in first-year writing and writing across the curriculum, and that could be used for on-campus and accreditation purposes
- Honoring first-year writing instructors' knowledge of their students and the discipline while also listening closely to the values and perspectives of instructors from other disciplines

As we considered how to build this assessment, we were mindful of challenges and warnings established by Huot about the dangers of constructing assessments “that honor the legitimate claims of various stakeholders,” but that “ignore the politics of power” as they are articulated and enacted *in* space, as well (55). We sought to balance the interests and concerns of outside “stakeholders” (54-55)—faculty, administrators, student services personnel, and others who worked with students outside of the first-year writing program in different ways and at different stages—and those inside of the program who worked with first-year students.

At the same time that we were considering the shape of this assessment, we were working with first-year writing program instructors to redesign the curriculum for English 120 (our first semester course), to make it more intentionally reflective and reflexive about context, style, and genre. Just as we were considering Huot’s admonition that assessment should be context-specific, we were also reading Anis Bawarshi’s 2003 work, *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*. Through that book, we were especially motivated by the idea that all writing takes place within genres. In a later essay developing this concept, Bawarshi asserts that genres are “the conceptual realms within which individuals recognize and experience situations at the same time as they are the rhetorical instruments by and through which individuals participate within and enact situation. Invention takes *place* [It is] an act of locating oneself socially” (Bawarshi 2006, 104). As the assessment project and our curriculum redesign work became increasingly intertwined, we began to think of this project through the lenses of genre theory. What would a project that conceived of assessment-as-genre, designed to help us understand what writing took what place, for whom, and why, look like? Investigating such questions would, we thought, provide us with valuable data about how writing was situated in this *place*, and could inform the continuing work of the first-year writing program to situate our courses (and the assignments and activities in them) through an increasingly complex and thorough understanding of context.

IDENTIFYING PLACE(S): CROSS-CAMPUS FOCUS GROUPS AND DCM

The first step in this assessment process involved discovering qualities associated with good writing in our campus community, our *place*.

To learn about this, we convened three focus groups consisting of a total of 18 invited members of the EMU community—three students, nine faculty, four professional staff members, and two administrators from around the campus. We also convened an additional focus group, later in the process, consisting of eight instructors, all from the first-year writing program. In convening the first set of (campus-wide) groups, we sought to invite not just key stakeholders (such as faculty members from departments that were

Linda and Heidi demonstrate how DCM sessions with students, faculty, and staff help educators identify and clarify characteristics of good writing in their specific places. By grounding their DCM work in their particular institutional context, Linda and Heidi foreground the evaluative dynamic among themselves, the dean, and their colleagues, and in the process, illustrate how local context functions in all DCM undertakings. *Stalions*

active in our university's writing across the curriculum program and whom we knew to be invested in student writing), but also participants who we thought would bring different and/or surprising perspectives to the discussions (such as the head of the math department and the Associate Director of University Housing).

We brought to these discussions some carefully crafted questions intended to guide the discussions, especially the connections between genre and *place*. We were especially cognizant, for instance, of the typical associations between "student writing" (to use the generic term so often invoked by those outside of composition) and "college" as a *place* reflected in knee-jerk statements like, "Aren't you appalled by student writing?" or "Students just can't write." We were well aware of the ways in which statements like these reflect elements of a dominant frame—that is, a boundary that both shapes interpretation of a symbol or idea, and fills in any "blank spots" that individuals might have regarding a subject. (This is the premise behind open-ended Socratic dialogue, for instance: those questions that seem 'open' but which have 'correct' answers.) "What is the writing of today's students like?" is such a question, with the already-known answers all-too prevalent today. (For more on framing see, for instance, Hall 1984, Lakoff 2004, Bray 2000, and Nunberg 2006. For more on prevalent narratives about students see Helmers 1994; and Adler-Kassner, Anson, and Howard 2008.) Bob Broad (2003) describes portfolio reading scenarios where instructors "tell unfettered truths about what they valued in the texts before them and compelled others to listen to those truths without dismissing them" (25). We sought those truths, as well, but crafted the questions in a way that deliberately privileged particular truths over commonplaces about student writing.

We also knew, in creating these focus groups, that we were building on groundwork that we had carefully laid over the previous five years. From the time we were hired, we—along with the other 40 or so instructors in the first-year writing program—had worked hard to change campus conversations about student writing, trying to focus them on what students *knew* and *could do* rather than what they didn't do and/or their (perceived) inabilities. For this purpose we had developed a curriculum for English 121 that engaged students in research work situated in real publics and real

communities. We also had created The Celebration of Student Writing, where students developed and shared a wide variety of multi-media projects based on their research work in our second-semester research writing course, English 121, that was attended by over 1000 people every semester (see Adler-Kassner and Estrem 2004). We had countless workshops, together and with colleagues from our writing across the curriculum program, on topics as wide-ranging as developing online instruction, to commenting on student writing, to developing good assignments. We had actively sought out and participated in any committee, discussion, activity, or program that had anything to do with student writing, and had worked with people from every unit on campus to share the work that we were doing in the first-year writing program and to improve that work in ways that took into consideration issues, passions, and concerns articulated in those meetings.

Even though Linda and Heidi's work focuses on first-year writing, their workshops with faculty across the curriculum and their discussions with a variety of stakeholders provide a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary DCM collaborative approach akin to Barry's interdisciplinary DCM assessment plan at Mid Michigan Community College (MMCC). *Stalions*

In and through all of this work, we were trying to both situate our program and approaches to writing instruction in our campus as a specific place, and to shape the perceptions of writing and writers that shaped discussions here.

Initially, we had drafted questions for these groups that asked participants to discuss the general features of good writing. But after a pilot focus group, we narrowed the focus of these questions, asking participants to "tell us a story" about their experiences with specific kinds of writing and reading.

Linda and Heidi's "story" heuristic helped ground faculty discussions of writing in their "place" just as Jane and Maureen's (University of Nevada, Reno) "movie poster" activity helped ground faculty discussions of assessment in their "perceptions" of writing. *Stalions*

This language of "story," we found, helped participants ground their work in a specific context, a specific *place* (Brown et al. 2005). Our intent was to ensure that participants would not initially jump to the default frame of what student writing "is," but would instead begin by exploring together their own specific terrains of "good writing." Thus, we asked participants to talk about *specific* qualities located in specific places:

- Tell us what makes a particular piece of writing [the piece they'd brought in] good writing
- Tell a story about a time when you wrote something inside of school or work that you considered meaningful or significant, and discuss why it was significant
- Tell a story about a time when you wrote something outside of school or work that you considered meaningful or significant, and discuss why it was significant
- Tell a story about a time when you read something inside of school or work that you considered important for you, and discuss why it was important
- Tell a story about a time when you read something outside of school or work that you considered important for you, and discuss why it was important

In the focus groups, we made the somewhat paradoxical discovery that asking participants to ground their discussions of qualities associated with good writing in specific “places” allowed us to make connections between and among those stories to more general qualities. (The tension between our insistence that qualities associated with good writing are grounded in specific places, but that we must then move those qualities to *other* specific sites, is one that suffuses this project, in fact.) For instance, the stories told by members of all three campus-wide focus groups about “something they wrote inside of school or work that they found valuable” centered around the writer’s engagement as it was represented through her or his interaction with the process and products of the writing. These related foci emerged in comments about the importance of taking ownership in the ideas in the writing, developing a writing process that enabled the writer to develop her or his own ideas, engaging in “discussion” or “dialogue” with the ideas of others (as they are represented in sources, for example), and affecting (in some way) the writer’s own ideas. Through their discussions, focus group participants were able to form connections and alliances around specific *places*, specific instances where they enacted writing in ways that were important and/or meaningful to them in different ways. These places were many and diverse—from eulogies to classroom assignments (described by teachers and students), from memoirs to research papers.

Slightly different versions of these same foci also emerged in discussions with first-year writing program instructors. These instructors’ responses were clearly articulated through their participation in the first-year writing program, which features extensive (and, we hope, healthy) collaboration among instructors and robust, collaborative professional development.

First-year writing program instructors, for instance, work together to develop the curricular infrastructure (readings, assignments, activities) for English 120 and English 121; determine, plan, and offer professional development workshops for one another; and engage in collaborative research about teaching-related activities. The result is a shared understanding of the “why” and “how” of writing instruction in our program, an understanding that extended to the ways in which this group positioned themselves in relation to writing undertaken in the context of the academy.

When talking about engagement, instructors placed a high value on the writer’s engagement, but also on the engagement of the teacher-as-reader with the writing. Similarly, while they valued dialogue between the writer and others’ ideas, they also valued watching writers (including themselves) grapple with the process of developing this dialogue, putting a premium on a kind of messiness that did not emerge as explicitly in focus groups comprised of people from outside of the first-year writing program.

ASSESSMENT AND DCM AS RHETORICAL ACTIVITY

When the three campus-wide and one first-year writing program focus group discussions were completed, we had more than seventy pages of transcripts from which to work. Here we drew on the concept of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) as it is articulated in *What We Really Value* (Broad 2003) to help us make sense of and bring order to the abundance of data. As Broad describes it, DCM is “a streamlined form of qualitative inquiry that yields a detailed, complex, and useful portrait of any writing program’s evaluative dynamics” (13). Initially, we’d been drawn to the power of DCM for representing a program’s values as they are grounded in specific sites— aspects of the work generated in the program, for instance. As we became immersed in this ongoing, complex assessment process, we also discovered that DCM served two fairly distinct purposes within our project. One was process-based—it provided a way for the two of us to *see*—really and truly, in a visual form—the “complex, conflicted, communal quilt of rhetorical values” (Broad, 120) that came into contact with one another through these discussions. The DCM process, in other words, gave us a way to work back and forth productively among the rich data of the transcripts, our analyses, and a visual document. As we sat and mapped and remapped, our understandings of the complexities of these conversations made real the tension between our focus on specific, narrated stories within specific contexts and the need to abstract from those specificities and make connections *across* contexts. Our DCM maps left us, as people who had “been there,” unsettled; they painted an uncomfortably abstracted picture. But, as we discuss later in this chapter, these DCMs also served important rhetorical purposes, providing us with important, strategic representations to take back to

the focus groups and to use as we continue advocating for a kind of public presence for writing on EMU's campus.

Rhetorically, the DCMs spoke volumes when we presented them to the full gathering of focus group participants several months following our initial conversations. The maps made visible to these diverse participants how strong particular themes were across all four conversations, and provided a powerful illustration of the rich possibilities for talking about "good writing"—and for considering, in turn, how that thinking might inform our thinking about *student* writing. After a two-hour meeting with members from all of the groups, we continued to revise both the maps and the assessment tool—for about six months, between November 2005 and May 2006—until we conducted the portfolio assessment for which the assessment tool was developed. The DCM maps thus became *places* where we could engage in a sustained conversation about writing instruction in and beyond our first-year writing program with a diverse group of "stakeholders" from inside and outside of that program.

In this sense, the dynamic criteria maps also helped us to strive to answer Patricia Lynne's (2004) call for "meaningfulness" and "ethics" as key terms for the composition research that underpins our work. She writes:

'meaningfulness' draws attention specifically to the purposes for and substance of any given assessment practice. Meaningful assessment, then, should be conducted for specific and articulated reasons, and its content should be intelligible to those affected by the procedure. 'Ethics' draws attention to assessment as it is practiced and specifically to the relationships among those involved in the process. (Lynne, 15)

DCM helped us shape what we believe was a meaningful and ethical assessment process, one that affected multiple groups of people.

Linda and Heidi's use of DCM reflects a courage to confront competing constituencies who feel a stake in the outcome of student writing and an effort to find a productive way of making competing voices part of the assessment of what a writing program does. *Harrington and Weeden*

ASSESSMENT AND DCM AS GENERATIVE SPACE

Above, we mention what we found to be one of the paradoxical aspects of this project: the theoretical framework (from Bawarshi 2003 and Huot 2002) suggests that qualities associated with "good writing" are site-specific, but our process had us taking specifics from one site and applying them to another (perhaps contradicting our premise that the site was important). Like the "quilt" invoked by Broad (2003), though, we took these sites as

separate “squares” in a common piece of work. Our challenge, then, was how to bring them together without erasing the interesting differences between them, especially as we were moving toward constructing a document that could be used to assess the portfolios of writers in our required, second semester composition course. We found, for instance, that we could find major themes among focus groups comprised of campus-wide members, and among those within the first-year writing program. But among the two groups, we also heard differences in the ways that writing was conceptualized, as we mention above. Comments by writing instructors in the first-year writing program focus group, who held a shared (and reinforced) sense of writing instructions developed and fostered through professional development work, generally could be said to focus on the *performance* being enacted in the writing as that performance was reflected in the writer’s engagement and the reader’s engagement. The first-year writing program group also talked about textual features; however, these features were seen as indicators of the writer’s engagement with the performance of the rhetorical process (as it was manifested, for instance, in the ways that they incorporated evidence into their writing), rather than as an indication of a particular mark of “quality” associated with the writing. This group, in other words, viewed the work of writing as a performance in *place*. Indicators of “quality” reflected both the writer’s understanding of that “place” (as it was evidenced in reflective/reflexive writing), *and* the analysis in the writing, *and* the writers use of conventions supporting the work in a particular genre. These indicators of “quality” emerged in small part because the first-year writing project group was talking about slightly different texts (provided by us, rather than by them); however, they primarily reflected the fairly unified, cohesive approach *to* writing instruction shared by members of the group (who were all active in the program and, in fact, were working on revising the first-semester class at the same time as they were engaged in this focus group work).

Major themes that emerged from the campus-wide focus groups had elements in common with the first-year writing program group’s work, but there also were differences. Members of these campus-wide groups typically focused on the writing as a product, rather than as a performance, and their primary foci were on the conventions manifest in the writing and the author’s seeming ownership of and investment in the topic. “Good writing” was also judged to have an effect on the writer and the reader—it helped each to clarify their feelings or ideas *and* to think differently about them (either by understanding them more deeply, or by challenging them). While this group also identified conventional features as important qualities of good writing—for instance, the writer’s engagement with the subject, the evidence used to develop and/or support the writing, and

the textual features manifest in the writing—they were cited as qualities that affected participants’ experiences of reading (especially as they affected their own emotional experiences). The *place* for this writing, in other words, was primarily comprised of the relationship that existed between writer and reader, rather than being constructed from an intersection of writer, reader, and context for writing.

Placing the emphasis on what students do seems to me a much richer discussion for both the students and the faculty than the endless rant about what they cannot do. *Alford*

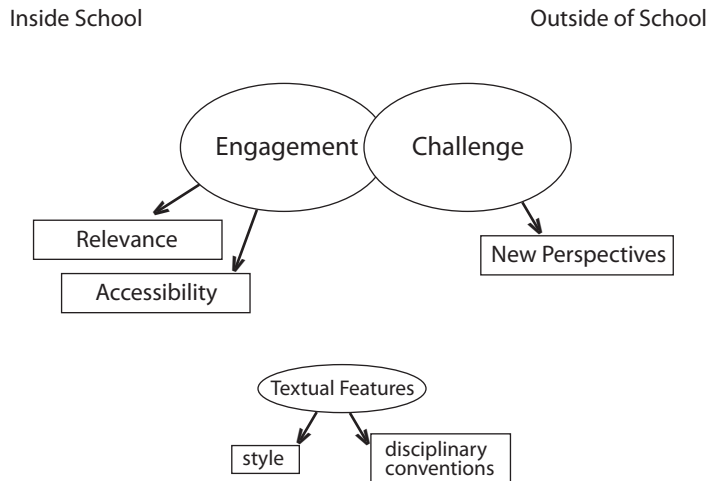
In our first attempt to make sense of these overlaps, we used Cmap Tools² software (which allow the user to construct “concept maps” using shapes of various sizes) to construct maps that captured representations of qualities associated with good writing, begin to identify the descriptors that were associated with those qualities (in the discussions), and visually express the relationships of one quality to another. (For example, we could represent the finding that, in the campus-wide focus group discussions, “engagement [of the reader]” and “challenge [to the reader’s ideas]” were qualities expressed equally often as important characteristics of good writing outside and inside of school or work, and these qualities overlapped. These two most frequently mentioned qualities were represented in large ovals. “Relevance” and “accessibility” were two descriptors linked to engagement; “new perspectives” was linked to challenge [and represented in rectangles linked to the larger term]. Campus-wide focus groups also associated “textual features” with qualities of good writing, but less often than engagement or challenge. Since this feature was mentioned less frequently, it was represented with a smaller, lower entry in the visual Cmap, and the two descriptors associated with it—“[appropriate use of] disciplinary conventions” and “style”—also were represented in rectangles sized in relation to the frequency of their mention in the discussions. See figure one.)

Our first challenge, then, was to figure out how to bring these two conceptions of writer and writing together in some kind of assessment instrument—one of the many spots in this evaluation process where we felt the push me-pull you tension between the objectivist frame for assessment reflected in concepts like “reliability” and “validity” and the social constructivist frame surrounding instruction in our writing program. For

2. CmapTools is software developed and provided as a free download by the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition (IHMC). The CmapTools web site explains that the software “empowers users to construct, navigate, share, and criticize knowledge models represented as Concept Maps.”

Fig 1. Concept Map

Questions One and Two
What is Good Writing / Examples of Good Writing
Inside and Outside of School



assessment scholars like Patricia Lynne, this tension provides the motivation to reject assessment models that do not reflect the latter frame:

Educational measurement theory defines large-scale assessment as a technical activity. Consequently, each aspect of an assessment situation is treated as a variable more or less within the control of the assessment designer or administrator. Composition theory, however, treats writing as a complex of activities and influences, most of which cannot be cleanly isolated for analysis or evaluation. (Lynne, 4)

Standing at this decision's juncture, we were at the metaphorical crossroads between a tactical use of our research, and a strategic one. Tactical work, as Michel deCerteau (1984) explains, is the work of making do, the work of the weak, the "other," in the face of strategy that is controlled by the powerful. Tactical work "operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them" (37). Strategic work, on the other hand, is the "calculation . . . of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power . . . can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats . . . can be managed" (36). Attempting to bring together these different conceptions of writing and of writers into a singular, unified document, and to use that reconciliation as the basis upon which to construct an assessment tool, would represent the tactical decision; a strategic one, on the other hand,

would involve something like stepping outside of the process and codifying definitions of “quality” based on the principles and ideas that represented *our* ideas.

Our very description of that kind of (strategic) decision signals the road we took: the tactical one. In taking that road, making that decision, we of course made compromises and, perhaps, lost a little. Two steps forward, one step back (or, in the worst of cases, the reverse: one forward, two back) is the way of the writing program administrator and writing instructor, the kind of negotiation within the bureaucracy that Richard Miller (1999) describes as the conditions of our working lives (3-9). Here, for instance, we were cognizant of the conversation with our former dean (which itself reflected an always-present broader sentiment regarding writing); the inroads we had already made through existing outreach efforts on campus described above (and the need to sustain and perpetuate those inroads, which were themselves tactical decisions); our desire to build additional relationships; and our desire to use this assessment to both inform our program’s practices and provide leverage to garner resources (financial and otherwise) to continue developing those practices. But then again, these are factors that contribute to *our* site, to the contexts for our practices—and we ignore that site at the risk of the writing program.

Thus, the first draft of our assessment tool tried to strike a compromise between these conceptions of “good” writing by accounting for *both* of them (when they differed, that is), as in the following example. First, readers would be asked to use a Likert scale to indicate their assessment of a *particular* quality (that had emerged as something associated with “good writing” among *all* the focus groups) in the portfolios of student writers. Then, they were asked to mark which qualities especially addressed that aspect of “good” writing. Working from Bawarshi’s notion (2003) that writing takes *place*, we knew we wanted to learn not only about *whether* and *to what degree* readers found the qualities associated with “good writing” in students’ portfolios, but also the criterion that they associated with good writing in this place in that work—what it looked like in *this* place, these portfolios. In the following two examples, then, “reader engagement” and “meaning to the writer” were identified across *all* groups as important qualities.

Linda and Heidi’s collaborative, collegial work to identify good qualities of writing in portfolios is similar to Susanmarie and Scott’s communal efforts at Indiana University/Purdue University–Indianapolis (IUPUI) to establish descriptions of high, medium, and low quality portfolios by way of faculty-driven DCM meetings. (See Appendix F to chapter five, “Approaching Grades in English W131.”) *Stalions*

After each Likert scale question, we asked raters to choose from a selection of descriptors (also articulated by focus groups) that were associated with these qualities. Herein lay the differences, though, as groups sometimes articulated *different* descriptors associated with qualities of good writing. In the first draft, we attempted to capture this difference and let raters work from it in their scoring: the list on the left represents descriptors associated with good writing emerging from the first-year writing program focus group; the list on the right represented the descriptors associated with this indicator from the campus-wide focus groups.

1. The papers in this portfolio were engaging to me as a reader.

1	2	3	4
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Which of the following qualities led you to respond as you have in #1? *Check three qualities from either or both columns that best describe your response:*

FYWP Focus Group

- Showed that the writer was using writing as a way to think through ideas
- Kept me interested as a reader
- Helped me see the writer making interesting/unusual connections
- Showed that the writer was thoughtfully moving between personal experience and evidence from outside sources

Campus-wide Focus Group

- Showed that the writer was engaged on multiple levels
- Showed the writer's authority
- Easy for me to read
- Accessible language and style
- Other (please specify)

7. Based on my reading, this writer seems to have been meaningful for the author of the portfolio.

1	2	3	4
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Which of the following qualities led you to respond as you have in #1? *Check three qualities from either/both that best describe your response:*

FYWP Focus Group

- Got a sense of the writer's investment in the question/topic
- Made compelling use of outside evidence to develop ideas
- Analysis in the papers seemed complex and thorough
- Other (please specify)

Campus-wide Focus Group

- Writer seems to have grown through the work
- Writing confirms author's feelings or ideas
- Writing seems meaningful for a specific audience
- Other (please specify)

Needless to say, we quickly realized that this bifurcated approach to portfolio analysis would present almost insurmountable challenges to our rating process. The data that these questions would produce would be so complicated as to be meaningless, and it would be extremely difficult to use those data to guide any kind of future work extending from the assessment. In essence, it might be a somewhat strategic decision to construct this kind of multi-perspectival rating instrument, but we thought that decision would interfere with *any* tactical gain that we might make because we weren't sure how we would analyze the results that we obtained through an assessment like this. Additionally, when we pilot tested this version of our assessment tool with raters, they told us that it was enormously confusing to use.

Returning to the data, then, we used a different visual method to chart the focus group transcripts. Where the Cmap Tools versions had provided us (and focus group participants) with static representations of (our analysis and interpretations of) the focus group discussions, this time we composed dynamic criteria maps that charted the *trajectory* of the conversations. Here we asked: How did these conversations unfold? What ideas, comments, and/or features of writing did participants pick up on and what was dropped? When comments, ideas, and/or features were picked up, how did they unfold as the conversation progressed? How did they lead participants to talk about other (related) topics, and what were those? The following are examples of the kinds of key phrases that led to additional, unguided conversation during our focus group sessions:

Takes complex subject and makes it accessible (*a thought, expressed by a participant, which served as a launching point for participants, who discussed it several times*) [which led to . . .]

Learns about something from a personal perspective [which led to . . .]

Challenges the writer's ideas [which led to . . .]

Makes complicated ideas accessible [which led to . . .]

Provides personal perspective [which led to . . .]

Gets point across without dragging out [which led to . . .]

Summarizes literature/makes an argument [which led to . . .]

Straightforward—helps her understand concepts, applies to life, what she wants to do [which led to a slightly different but related concept of connecting theory and practice, which led to]

Mattering—putting what's there to use

This re-mapping allowed us to conceive of another way to represent the descriptors associated with “good writing” in broader categories of related topics. For example, these discussants identified “Taking complex ideas and making them accessible” as a major quality of good writing. Re-mapping also helped us identify descriptors associated with these “big picture” topics. For instance, this group associated “challenging ideas,” “providing a personal perspective,” and “getting [the writer’s] point across without dragging it out” as descriptors of “taking complex ideas and making them accessible.”

Using this approach, then, we could identify major qualities that spanned all of the focus groups and list all of the descriptors associated with those major qualities articulated by all of the groups, first-year writing program and campus-wide alike. We could then design an assessment tool that asked raters to indicate whether or not these major qualities were evident (to them) and, if they were, what descriptors indicated to them that they were evident:

Based on my reading, this writer seemed interested in the subject(s) that s/he wrote about in this portfolio.			
1	2	3	4
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Which of the following qualities in this portfolio led you to conclude how interested the writer was? <i>Check all that apply:</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kept me interested as a reader • Showed that the writer was engaged on multiple levels • Easy for me to read—demonstrated humor or other appealing qualities • Other (please specify) 			

While this version resolved the dilemma we faced in the earlier one by creating a list for readers to choose from, we felt—and found—that it was too constrictive. Our pilot test raters indicated that they wanted to articulate what they had found without having to place a judgment on the extent to which they had found it, at least initially.

After one more push—and with assistance from our colleague Gisela Ahlbrandt in the math department—we developed a final version of the assessment instrument. This version consisted of three parts. In the first, readers simply *described* their experiences with the portfolio, indicating what qualities associated with “good writing” they found to be *present* in the writer’s work. We referred to each of these major qualities as “keys” so that we could ask raters to refer to the “keys” later in their reading/rating:

Section One: Describing (5 minutes)

In this section, please indicate which of the qualities below you found to be present in this portfolio by checking the boxes next to the words. Please respond to the portfolio as a whole, choosing as many qualities as appropriate. If qualities are absent, please add them in the space for “other” at the bottom of this section. In the next section of this rating, you will be asked to refer to the keywords listed above these qualities.

The writing in this portfolio demonstrates that:

Key: Challenge/Development (Choose as many as appropriate):

- a. The writer’s ideas about the subjects(s) or genres in the essays were challenged as a result of the writing
- b. The writer’s ideas developed as a result of the writing
- c. The writer developed a different perspective on her/his subject(s) as a result of the writing

In the second section they *rated* the qualities associated with good writing in the work and, ideally, responded to a prompt that invited them to draw on qualities from the first section that led them to the assessment of the writer’s work that they assigned.

Section Two: Rating (5 minutes)

In this section, please use the scale below to indicate how strongly you agree that the qualities indicated in each statement are present in the portfolio.

The papers in the portfolio indicate that:

The writer’s ideas about the subject(s) in the portfolio were challenged as a result of the writing.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree
- f. N/A

If possible, please write 2-3 sentences about the portfolio contents that led you to your rating.

In the third section, raters wrote a letter *to the writer* about their experience of reading the work, again drawing on qualities associated with “good writing” from the first section.

Please write a brief response to the writer about your experience of reading the portfolio. If possible, please focus on 3-5 of the Keys (see Section I) that engaged you, and 3-5 of the keys that interfered with your process of reading the material included.³

This tripartite rating tool allowed us to attend to the differences in *place* that emerged from the first-year writing program and campus-wide focus groups, essentially by including *all* of the places as options for readers.

Equally important, though, the tool made it possible for us to understand the ratings assigned during the assessment process as an act of *place*, as well. Correlations between “key” questions in the first part of the assessment tool and “ranking” questions in the second (which, as above, ask raters to indicate the degree to which they found that the

One of the strengths of this approach is the concern over how things “travel” from one audience to another and how they get connected by reading. This reading seems full of depth and details and asks readers to think about what writing triggers in them and how that shapes a response. I like that people aren’t being coerced into a reading or made to squeeze their response into a one size fits all form. All of that makes this example one that other “places” can emulate and learn from. *Alford*

The most appealing aspect of Linda and Heidi’s work is how DCM focus groups can be used to unearth good qualities of writing and to create a communal, institutional writing assessment tool. This tool, the tripartite rating tool, successfully identifies and responds to qualities of good writing within an interdisciplinary context. *Stalions*

“key qualities” were present in the portfolio) allowed us to understand how people understood the relationship between “qualities of good writing” and the assignments of value (through the Likert scale) *to* that writing. For instance, raters were asked to indicate in the first section what *kinds* of connections (if any) they found in the portfolios they read:

- a. The writer found connections between her or his interests and the subject(s) of the writing

3. While EMU is not a resource-rich institution, the university does provide support for the first-year writing program in the form of reassigned time for the director (Adler-Kassner) and assistant/associate director (at the time of this project, Estrem). This assessment was developed as part of our writing program administration work and supported by that time. We also received a research assistant grant from the EMU Graduate School to support a graduate student for 30 hours of work during the summer of 2004-2005. Funds from our department’s development fund made it possible for us to purchase small bookstore gift cards for campus-wide focus group participants, but the first-year writing program participants engaged in this work as a[n additional] “donation” of their time, insight, and talented selves to the program and the department.

- b. The writer found connections between theoretical or research-based concepts and the subject(s) of the writing
- c. The writer thought independently about the subject(s) of the writing

Then in the second section raters were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “The writer found a connection between her/his ideas and those that s/he wrote about in the subject of the writing.” There was a strong correlation between the quality, “connection between the writer’s ideas and the subject of the writing” (q2a) and a Likert rating of *strongly agree* or *agree* on the question in the second section. There was an extremely strong correlation (of 100 percent) between “a connection between theoretical or research-based concepts and the subject of the writing” and a rating of *strongly agree* or *agree* on q12 (i.e., “there was a strong connection between the writer’s ideas and those in the portfolio”). Thus, we learned that in this place—that is, student portfolios from English 121—raters found that connection to theoretical or research-based concepts was a *stronger* indicator of “good writing” than was solely “connection between the writer’s ideas and the subject of the writing,” though the former quality (between ideas and writing) was absolutely necessary for the raters to agree that the work manifested this quality at all. In the same way, looking at correlations between qualities associated with “engagement” and a question asking raters to indicate whether they believed the writer enjoyed some aspect of the writing (a problematic question, to be sure, but a quality of good writing that emerged strongly from the campus-wide focus groups) indicated that if raters “did not find investment in the product of the writing without investment in the subject of the writing” (Adler-Kassner and Estrem 2004-06).

Correlations also provided us with snapshots of specific qualities of reading—for instance, they demonstrated that writers’ use of “well defined and interesting evidence” and “clear language” used to describe that evidence were integrally linked to raters’ assessment of whether or not “the papers in the portfolio demonstrate thorough evidence that supports the purpose of writing” (Adler-Kassner and Estrem 2004-06).

MAPPING PROGRAM REVISION THROUGH ASSESSMENT

The results of the actual assessment, then, met our goal of providing us with data that was both complex, qualitative, and rich (what we were most interested in), while also providing ways for us to make clear, quantitatively-based arguments when those are needed (what busy administrators are often most interested in). In the last year, for instance, we have been able to point to these data in conversations with the Assistant Vice President for Retention,

the chair of the General Education Assessment Committee, and the new Vice President for Enrollment Management. (It also is included in EMU's accreditation portfolio under the Higher Learning Commission's Quality Improvement Process [AQIP] track.) These administrators have been interested to learn about the quantitative results (which indicate where the majority of the sample do, and do not, demonstrate qualities associated with good writing). Even more, though, they are reassured to learn that there *is* an assessment process in place here, that there are quantitative data being collected that are then serving as the foundation for development and additional assessment—in other words, that the program's directors know what administrators want to hear, can provide that information, and know what to do with it. This, in turn, means that these same administrators both appreciate the value of the program and endorse its work.

Equally important, this assessment has been important in establishing directions for curriculum and professional development work within the program. Based on it, for instance, first-year writing program instructors have undertaken a year-long (and counting) collaboration project with two of our smartest librarians to revise the approach to research embedded in our research writing class, work that directly addresses findings about “using theoretical or research-based ideas to develop the writer's ideas” from the assessment. Further, because research *is* the subject of that class, we are engaged in “remodeling” that course—keeping the walls, but moving some of the rooms around, as it were, by more clearly articulating the different phases of the research process/course calendar and identifying how the strategies that students develop in the course should be scaffolded over the course of a semester's work. Additionally, during the 2007-2008 academic year, the first-year writing committee, a group comprised of first-year writing program instructors, will consider the assessment results as they examine (and, probably, revise) the program's outcomes.

In the end, this assessment was *all* invention in the sense that Bawarshi (2003) has defined it. From conceiving the project, to conducting focus group discussions that formed the core of the assessment; from the analysis of transcripts from the discussions to the “drafting” of documents that attempted to shape some meaning from the discussions—all of this was “taking *place*.” The assessment we designed aimed to consider how the *place* affected the “taking”: how the qualities that focus group participants identified as important were connected with specific sites (spatial, temporal, and otherwise); what connections existed between those *places* and the places of students in our first semester course; what kinds of locations were developed through the work of that course; and how those location(s) intersected—or didn't—with the *places* in which focus group members situated their own thinking, writing, and thinking about writing.

Also and importantly, the project highlighted for us as writing program administrators how assessment can be used both to gather information about a particular place—the first-year writing program—and to *influence* the conversations within another, overlapping place—our campus. We were very much aware of how important it was to set up circumstances that would affect us *all* when we convened the focus groups. We knew that our own representations of writing—in the questions we asked and in the maps we generated—would undoubtedly influence the conception of “first-year students’ writing” that these participants from across campus held. What we learned from them influenced our work enormously; the conversations and (re)considerations of what (student) writing is and can be continue on campus today.

INTERCHAPTER

In the vein of Linda and Heidi's DCM work at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), Barry grounded his DCM assessment project in Mid Michigan Community College's (MMCC's) institutional "place." At both EMU and MMCC, colleagues across the disciplines and various stakeholders were invited to employ DCM assessment practices to identify qualities of good writing. Linda, Heidi, and Barry facilitated interdepartmental dialogues, which led to shared, communal values about writing practices and standards. These DCM ventures emphasized the importance of multi-modal, locally-contextualized assessments. In the most expansive application of DCM to date, however, Barry oversaw the development of an axiological assessment model for assessing writing in every course in the college. (Stalions)

3

DCM AS *THE* ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Mid Michigan Community College

Barry Alford

The other examples of DCM (dynamic criteria mapping) included in this volume are focused on how the process works in English departments housed in four-year schools. While those examples have some contextual and discursive issues as a subtext about what and how assessment measures are structured, they are still implementing DCM in an institutional and cultural context that is more similar than it is different. That is, while departments have their own internal tensions, they share a field of study and discursive practices that community college “programs” do not. As a result, faculty in community colleges often end up talking past each other when trying to develop models of assessment. The example of DCM in this chapter describes it as the basis of an institutional plan of assessment in the two-year colleges. In this context, assessment has to bridge gaps between disciplines and between programs that have few, if any, common educational goals. In this environment, the differences in discourse and methodology are so extreme that many institutions avoid even trying to assess common student outcomes. The experiences with DCM at Mid Michigan Community College (MMCC) may provide a way forward for assessment that has to engage practitioners across a variety of disciplines and discourses.

Community college faculty, many of whom teach a five-class-per-semester load, are justifiably resistant to assessment schemes that require them to file more paperwork or use assessment instruments that are extraneous to the classes they teach. Some of the programs at MMCC already have licensure exams, and it was difficult to start a dialogue around the “general education” outcomes that tie the whole college together. One of the selling points of DCM was that the assessment was grounded in the work their students were already doing. It is also based on the values that the faculty already had and were trying to communicate to their students. These are issues critical to making assessment work in an environment where resources and time are already at a premium. It is also assessment that is focused on the real success of our students and not on testing instruments that have

often already labeled these students as failures. Michigan has had an exit exam for high school students for a decade, and the students that go to community colleges have not been well served by it. It was important that assessment enrich instruction and not just serve external agencies or provide a “score” that told us little about the real capabilities of the student.

The Mid Michigan Community College (MMCC) experience is an important one for critics of DCM to consider. It is easy to read a description of DCM and think “we’d never have time for that” or “my colleagues would never go for that—they’re already too busy.” Barry and his colleagues suggest that DCM provides a way past the barrier of time constraints that often frustrates initial assessment efforts. DCM proceeds from what is already there, encouraging faculty to start with what they are already doing, creating strengths from each department or program’s distinctive features. *Harrington and Weeden*

Another motivating factor for trying to use DCM was the experience those of use in the writing program had with our portfolio project. For about a dozen years prior to implementing DCM on an institutional scale, we had worked as a department on an exit portfolio for the freshman composition class. The value of working together, of dialogue about our objectives, successes, and failures was invaluable to us as a department. When it came time to revisit the question of institutional assessment, I wanted to bring that experience to the table. That is, I wanted an assessment plan that valued our collaboration and growth. DCM had not been coined when we started our portfolio project, but it fit the model we followed in developing and changing our department’s assessment initiative.

In some college contexts, “assessment” has become such a dreaded word that faculty can hardly imagine it as a process that, as Barry *Alford* says in chapter three of this volume, “engag[es] practitioners across a variety of disciplines.” However, at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) we found this cross-contextual engagement as well, for at the heart of DCM is listening—and we all want our values to be heard, our stories to be told. Using assessment to listen, gather stories, and engage people from across disciplines is enormously powerful. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

MMCC had followed a basic assessment plan for a little more than a decade. As with a lot of assessment plans, ours identified some key data sources and intended outcomes but left the process of assessment heavily weighted toward an administrative model of compliance. The problem with compliance models is that there is little internal dialogue about what is really learned and the institutional context never gets any “smarter” as a

result. With the exception of a few pockets of faculty activism, the kind of assessment we were practicing had little effect on faculty culture, failed to make a mark on the legion of adjunct faculty, and was virtually invisible to our students.

The impetus for change came from two concerns that the earlier plan never seemed to address no matter how many times we tried to call the question. First, it was difficult to move our idea of assessment away from a compliance model. That is, it was impossible to frame assessment issues as an organic part of the learning community at the college and not as some external obligation. Granted, there were places in the college where assessment had evolved beyond that, but not many. The English faculty had implemented a successful exit portfolio assessment and the math faculty had worked with the introductory algebra courses, for example, but there wasn't anything that connected these efforts, which is often another feature of compliance-based assessment. Second, as the focus of assessment itself changed to include students, it became clear that an esoteric and isolated collection and reporting of data was insufficient. What we decided to do was to go back to the faculty and build an assessment model based on their values which then could be measured, tracked and communicated to students and adjunct faculty.

The rich tradition within writing studies (Huot 2002; Lynne 2004; deJoy 2004) of considering the role of students in assessment and research is at once commonsensical and radical. The best kinds of assessment respond to real students and real faculty in real situations, as is outlined here. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

MMCC's transition from a compliance assessment model to an axiological assessment model parallels the paradigm shift from indirect, psychometric assessment models to direct, social constructivist assessment models in the composition field. Educators now recognize the necessity for establishing rhetorical, locally-contextualized, assessment research models based upon constructivist principles. *Stalions*

We decided to try DCM after several attempts at elaborate but spectacularly unsuccessful models of assessment that we'd hoped would provide a common language and methodology for the entire college. Part of our motivation was to find a way to talk about assessment that matched a continuous Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) that the college had moved to for its own accreditation. As part of the North Central Accreditation system, MMCC had adopted a model of quality improvement that put process ahead of results, so the assessment question became what

do these results mean and how did we get there and not just another bar graph or pie chart that was unrelated to anything else.

We value process in writing instruction. How, then, can we communicate an appreciation for process as much as results to our colleagues? To administrators? How can process be as visible as bar graphs and pie charts? Context-sensitive assessment highlights process as a generative, productive stage. DCM articulates this process in a strategic way for additional layers of audiences. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

Part of the motivation was to generate a conversation that might make assessment part of our disparate faculty cultures and give us a common ground, a “third-space,” if you will, to work from. Finally, we wanted assessment to be grounded in real student work and not inferred from published instruments normed in populations of students that did not mirror our own for institutions that our students did not attend.

One of the first decisions we made was to use an outside facilitator to begin constructing our DCM model. In many of the other examples in this volume, people within the department serve as the facilitators, but it was clear in our case that a “fair broker” from outside the institution would be necessary when faculty from a variety of divisions and disciplines were involved. The decision was crucial in gaining the acceptance of faculty from across the college. This is another example of how an institutional context is different from a departmental one. DCM could not work if one of the disciplines owned it too much. A new start required a new face and a new discourse, even if the examples of student work and shared outcomes were going to be intensely local. In addition, the process of drawing out comments in what the facilitator called an “anti-powerpoint,” made the process visual and not just numerical or discursive, something we know students often need but may underestimate in dealing with faculty. Having the facilitator list the hundreds of responses on the screen gave all of the faculty the chance to see that their suggestions were included and that the outcome wasn’t rigged by one group of faculty. This helped resolve the tension between departments which had previously had varying degrees of engagement in the assessment process. In fact, the maps we developed became a key component of the DCM plan. Being able to “see” the relationship of ideas and components was critical in having a common reference point at a time in the process when the language was still developing and often unclear and unreliable.

PHASE ONE: MAKING THE MAP

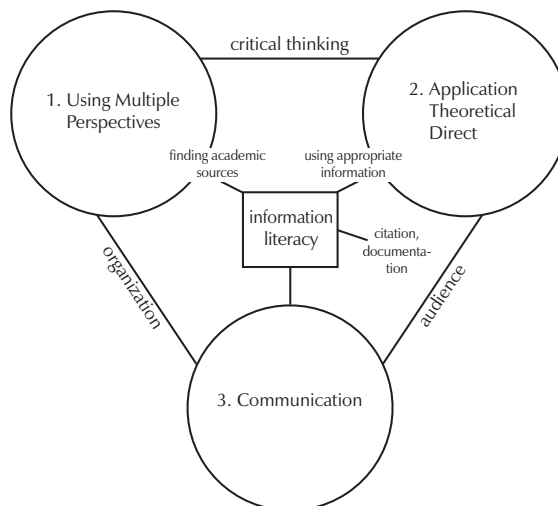
In the first phase of DCM we collected samples of student work from a variety of courses and disciplines. In smaller groups and as a whole faculty we responded to four questions about the assignments collected:

1. What did we value in the work?
2. What would we advise the student to change/improve/revise?
3. What did we value about the assignment?
4. What would we change/revise in the assignment?

Faculty members across the disciplines collaborated to develop a “common evaluation strategy” visually depicted in MMCC’s dynamic criteria map. The “MMCC Student Outcomes Values” map, which facilitates interdepartmental and faculty-student discussions concerning shared assessment criteria, highlights the very best that communal writing assessment (CWA) pedagogy has to offer. According to Broad (1997, 2003), CWA privileges collaborative decision-making assessment processes. *Stalions*

Under Bob Broad’s direction, the faculty produced almost 200 hundred responses to the student samples. In a subsequent meeting the faculty, working in teams and as a whole, grouped these responses into three categories that became the “map” we would follow. This phase took most of a day-long faculty in-service and included lively debate before some visual and rhetorical consensus started to emerge. When the dust settled, we had a first draft of the maps, as shown in Figure 1.

Fig 1. MMCC Student Outcomes Values



The faculty decided to focus on three areas:

1. Working from multiple perspectives
2. Application
3. Communication and presentation skills

We came to recognize from our discussions that while the appearance and content of what we expected from students might differ, the concept behind what we had them do was the same across disciplines. For example, whether a student is choosing among competing theories and terms or choosing which clinical or technical application was appropriate, they were performing the same intellectual function. The maps allow us to talk across disciplines and programs in ways that make our expectations clear to our students and make them see connections among their various courses. The forms and techniques of evaluation or measurement may be particular to the protocols and methods of a particular field, but the maps allow us to carry on a faculty- and college-wide discussion of their value and significance.

Certainly, at the beginning of our DCM inspired process at University of Nevada, Reno, rubric was almost a dirty word. However, our focus groups and subsequent star rubric (yes, we have embraced the word) have become a source of pride for our assessment. The shift from avoidance to acceptance was spurred by the conversations among instructors regarding what they needed to assess portfolios for programmatic purposes. The star rubric that resulted from hours of dialogue provides a way for all of our audiences to benefit from the assessment results. *McBride and Detweiler*

As that discussion continued, we kept coming back to the question of how different disciplines could use the maps, and how the maps were to be interpreted. As part of that discussion we developed a more concrete list of what “multiple perspectives” meant to us. Clearly, some of the suggestions are pretty specific and some are still pretty vague. An important observation here is that these lists came out of the same process as the maps. That is, we met as a whole, took public notes in the “anti-power point” model and dialogued until we reached consensus. If the list or rubrics that followed were produced using any other process, they would invalidate the fresh start we made and threaten the buy-in of the whole faculty.

The following lists and rubrics were created using the same process that yielded Figure 1. Figure 2 and the outline that follows it were second and third iterations, or levels, of the first map.

Fig 2. Goals for General Education: Using Multiple Perspectives

1. *Commitment to Learning*
 - a. Taking responsibility for learning
 - i. Curiosity and commitment to inquiry
 - ii. Setting goals and personal standards
 - iii. Developing autonomy as a learner
 - b. Contributing toward a learning environment
 - i. Thoughtful participation in class
 - ii. Respectful behavior toward faculty and fellow students
 - iii. A peaceful and violence-free classroom to contribute ideas without fear
 - iv. Sobriety to reduce distractions
 - v. No cell phones or pagers inside the classroom

2. *Critical Literacies*

- a. Finding appropriate sources
 - i. Choosing search methods and tools
 - ii. Evaluating credibility
- b. Using multiple strategies in reading, writing and listening
 - i. Reading and writing in different disciplines
 - ii. Learning how to participate in a discussion
 - iii. Learning to summarize and analyze
 - iv. Learning to synthesize
 - v. Rhetorical analysis and sensitivity
 - vi. Options for organization
- c. Flexible textbook strategies
 - i. Different disciplines and discourse communities
 - ii. Learning terminologies and concept structures
 - iii. Different organizational approaches used in textbooks
- d. Audience awareness and analysis
 - i. Academic audiences
 - ii. Protocols and expectations
 - iii. Diversity of audiences

3. *Problem Posing and Problem Solving*

- a. Conceptualizing a problem
 - i. Using tools and strategies to frame and articulate the problem
 - ii. Willingness to take risks to find new ways to pose problem
 - iii. Learning to frame academic problems
- b. Willingness to use multiple approaches to a problem
 - i. Learning to see conflict as productive
 - ii. Willingness to engage a problem from more than one viewpoint
 - iii. Willingness to see value and credibility in divergent viewpoints
 - iv. Respecting alternative views
- c. Pattern recognition
 - i. Generalizing
 - ii. Connecting
 - iii. Synthesis
 - iv. Creative patterns
- d. Using critical reasoning
 - i. Use of sources and evidence
 - ii. Drawing connections and conflicts
 - iii. Creating a 'third' space

PHASE TWO: MAKING IT WORK AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

The next phase was to take the mapping process to a program or course level. We have identified discrete groups of faculty—English/humanities, social science, science, business, technical/occupational, and nursing/radiography—who worked together to identify what the three categories in the maps mean in their discipline area. Specifically, we asked them to identify where in their programs or courses these attributes of student work are measured and how. In some areas there are common assignments, and in other areas there are assignments that parallel each other. In either case, faculty developed a common evaluation strategy, whether that be a rubric or point scale, that is connected to the way student work is evaluated and which can be communicated to students to help them understand the assignment and its evaluation.

It is in this phase that the flexibility of DCM became most evident. In our previous attempts at assessment the differences in evaluation techniques and metrics was a barrier to common assessment. That is, if one faculty member values essays, another uses multiple choice tests, and a third uses some form of performance assessment, what do they have in common? The answer became that they were different ways of teaching and assessing a common outcome, such as problem posing. It is fair to say that broader terms, such as critical thinking, could facilitate the same discussion, but we could never agree what critical thinking was until we broke it down into smaller components. Plus, every academic already “owned” their own definition of critical thinking, but we created these categories together, which prevented them from being always already colonized.

Communicating to Students

What follows is a description of the work we are currently (as of this writing) doing and planning. In the first two phases the emphasis was on faculty-to-faculty dialogue. Now we are giving the maps to students and trying to help faculty use them to explain assignments and programs. At this point students become the primary focus of the plan.

Using the dynamic criteria map, faculty members share learning outcomes, curricular expectations, and assessment criteria with students to help them become more proficient writers and learners, for student learning is at the nucleus of all DCM endeavors. Broad (2003) explained that there is an “unparalleled educational potential for dynamic criteria mapping to give our students a more complex and true portrait of how writing is learned, practiced, and valued,” which will, in turn, help students “better understand the challenge of writing well” (120-21). *Stalions*

We will work with all adjunct faculty to explain how to use the maps to help students understand both the expectations and means of evaluation. In the curriculum and program review process, we have created syllabi that are starting to look and sound consistent across programs and disciplines. That means that our students hear us talk about these outcomes and categories from course to course. When students in a technical program raise the inevitable question about the value of the humanities course they are in, the answer now goes back to a common theme of learning to think and act in ways consistent with the outcomes in the maps.

Mapping highlights a key tension, for a map is always a representation. What territory gets named and included, which interests are represented, how much space is given to various countries—this too is an unavoidable tension in DCM. Yet as this anecdote reveals, a map that is drawn from communally negotiated values is vastly different from one that too quickly settles in. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

The revised maps from above have been attached to the college's website and to course syllabi to help introduce students to the DCM process. Those materials also include the materials presented in the next section.

Rubrics

In some DCM applications, rubrics are a dirty word. In fact, some DCM applications are driven by the desire to replace a rubric-driven assessment. It was never part of the "plan" to develop rubrics for our DCM maps, but both students and faculty, adjunct faculty in particular, wanted and needed something they felt was more specific and concrete to help them understand what the values and outcomes really meant. We developed the rubrics the same way we did the maps, in collaboration with the whole faculty. They reflect what the faculty identified as measurable standards for the items listed as "multiple perspectives." An example is included in table below.

The maps and rubrics attached are the result of two years of work with the whole faculty. They may be of little use to anyone outside the institution, but they help demonstrate some important and essential ways that DCM 'fits' the need for meaningful assessment that builds on faculty involvement and direction. They also help define and negotiate the tension between internal and external audiences. We are getting much better at connecting any data we collect about student achievement to this ongoing discussion in ways that allow us to talk to outside evaluators using the structure of our internal discourse.

MMCC Table 1: *Conceptualizing a Problem*

5	4	3	2	1
Can grasp the key ideas as part of an independent recognition and articulation of the problem	Can grasp the key ideas as part of a mostly independent recognition and articulation of the problem	Can grasp most of the key ideas as part of a class directed recognition and articulation	Has some difficulty grasping the key ideas as part of a class directed recognition of the problem and have trouble articulating	Cannot grasp the key ideas of the problem and cannot articulate the problem clearly
Can see the significance of the problem and of posing the problem, including:	Can see the significance of the problem and of posing the problem, including <i>many</i> of the following:	Can see the significance of the problem and of posing the problem, including <i>some</i> of the following:	Has difficulty seeing the significance of the problem or posing the problem in any of the following manners:	Does not see the significance of the problem or of learning to pose the problem using:
cause and effect relationships	cause and effect relationships	cause and effect relationships	using different approaches	different approaches
different ways of approaching the problem	different ways of approaching the problem	different ways of approaching the problem	cause and effect relationships	cause and effect relationships
means of researching the problem	means of researching the problem	means of researching the problem	thorough research	research
ability to go beyond materials and discussions of the problem presented in class	ability to go beyond materials and discussions of the problem presented in class	ability to go beyond materials and discussions of the problem presented in class	going beyond the materials and discussions of the problem presented in class	going beyond class discussions or materials
Can empathize and respect other positions	Respects and can often empathize with other positions	Respects other positions	Has difficulty respecting and/or empathizing with other positions	Seldom respects or empathizes with other positions

It's fascinating that the irony we discovered at EMU exists in the MMCC context as well: that, once highly localized and personalized values for writing have been carefully noted, patterns emerge that are meaningful across contexts—even contexts which initially might not have seemed compatible.

Adler-Kassner and Estrem

The following are the points about our instance of DCM I think need to be emphasized:

Local

DCM is always local, although the scope of “local” can be negotiated to larger collectives and regional agencies. Regardless of the size of the group, the key element is that the values are articulated from real student work with real faculty. When Brian Huot talks about a “culture of assessment” in his 2002 work, *(Re) Articulating Writing Assessment*, he is making a case for

a dialogical and integrated view of assessment that requires practitioners to put assumptions about how we evaluate and respond to student work on the table so they can be examined and interrogated. Bob Broad's work in *What We Really Value* (2003) builds on that concept, but only by actually engaging in the dialogue can the work begin. The dialogue is always a specific and local event that cannot be scripted in advance. It is inevitably "messy" and not always easy to direct, but the local nature of the assessment is a strength. It also recognizes an ethical concern that working with open-admissions students brings into play: Is the assessment a screening device that, given the educational and class backgrounds of the students, will be used to deny them access? Or, is the assessment a means of improving the learning and recognizing the capabilities of these students? DCM has the potential to improve and measure performance without destroying the local context of learning and teaching that creates and supports it.

Fractal

To say that something is fractal suggests that it is built not from linear and pre-configured models but is an iterative and organic approach that creates variable formations and multiple perspectives. DCM is a fractal concept in two important ways. First, it allows us to change the level of specificity without losing the main or organizing concept. For example, we can talk about one of the points in a rubric at any of several different levels. It can be evaluated as a program goal, a course goal, a general education goal, as an outcome for an assignment, or even just part of an assignment. It can also be a piece of writing, a test score, a visual representation, or a performance. Some of our best discussions have been between faculty from different disciplines or programs negotiating what it means for a student to show competency across those barriers.

Barry's argument that assessments can and should be fractal and multi-modal, incorporating all perspectives into an organic whole, demonstrates how educators must now navigate and negotiate diverse, multiple postmodern perceptions in order to validate assessments. Broad (1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, Broad and Boyd 2005) discusses such assessment enterprises. *Stalions*

The second aspect of DCM as fractal is that it allows, or encourages, multiple hypotheses. This is significant because it allows us to reframe problems and results in many ways and for many different audiences. As Nuhfer (2006) suggests, fractal concepts help deal with situations with too many variables to approach them in a strictly linear fashion or a way to track things that move through time, both apt descriptions of assessment. This is another way that DCM succeeds because it is not a self-contained metric

of its own. In this sense, its fractal qualities allow a scan of possible inputs and outcomes. Instead of looking at the difficulty students have in posing problems in one class or one discipline, we see them in interconnected but not identical contexts that have multiple points of interest and multiple forms of dialogue and intervention. It has become, particularly in the general education area, a rich source of dialogue about teaching and learning.

Here, echoes arise with Rob Pope's (1995) interesting work in *Textual Intervention: Critical and creative strategies for literary studies* in which he explores with students "what happens if" an element of a piece of writing is changed. Context-sensitive writing assessment functions as an intervention on the "text" of a program or college; it gives an opportunity to reassess values, to ask "what if" we look again at what we value in student writing. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

Ecological

Meg Syverson (1999), following the work of her mentor Edwin Hutchins (1995), talks about an "ecology" of composition. That is, she creates a rich and multi-modal view of what writing is and how it can be assessed. DCM moves in many of the same ways, although it adds something that Syverson cannot claim in her account. DCM helped us create a background against which the various results, teaching strategies, and outcomes could be arranged. It frames an ecology of interrelated but not necessarily similar efforts as a common project. As Hutchins argues in *Cognition in the Wild*, (1995), intelligence is as much a social and material (through tools and instruments) construction as it is a property of individual cognition. A DCM model helps make the construction visible and makes it possible to ask questions about how valuable or appropriate any individual measure is to the overall assessment of student learning.

Syverson's (1999) models depend on exactly the same kind of texture that DCM assessment creates. Sometimes it takes multiple exposures and frames of reference to evaluate what students are doing or how well a program is working. Constructed this way, our dialogues about student outcomes are never reduced to a test score or single point of assessment. Conversely, we know that merely raising a mean score doesn't necessarily mean that the learning outcome has been met or understood. Our assessment project has helped develop a significantly complex and multi-modal approach which, like any ecological system, requires a careful and humane interpretive approach.

Two-year colleges lack some the "institutional insulation" that four-year schools have from the demand for assessment from outside agencies. Without a culture of assessment within the institution to focus assessment

on student work and faculty values, the drive to find valid forms of assessment often alienates faculty from the assessment process and tells the institution nothing about how it can be, in Hutchins' (1995) terms, more "intelligent." When assessment is driven by the institutional research person or department or by the ill-conceived notion of assessment evident in the political discourse of educational reform, faculty are often left out of the loop and without a place at the table.

Our IUPUI experience mirrors the MMCC experience: DCM led to a cultural change in which the faculty felt in control of the assessment. The DCM process truly allowed faculty values to drive programmatic changes with an eye on student learning outcomes—and that's the foundation of a meaningful assessment cycle. *Harrington and Weeden*

It is significant that our assessment program has been recognized as viable and as fulfilling our accreditation requirements. In other words, this isn't just pie in the sky, this is real and viable assessment that can stand up to outside evaluation. In the end, it is assessment meant to help mirror and evaluate what we value in our teaching and our students and not an attempt to reduce teaching and learning to an assessment.

From our experiences at two institutions (and from discussions with countless other WPAs), we have discovered that faculty-grown assessment is valued institutionally when it's done well and communicated clearly. It's choosing to do nothing that is the dangerous position for WPAs or other faculty to take. All colleges and universities face increasing scrutiny, and assessment—when it responds to principles like those outlined in recent work by Huot (2002) and Lynne (2004)—can respond to and enrich that kind of close attention. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

Barry and his colleagues' DCM assessment model and pedagogy are validated based upon the theory of complementarity, the theoretical rationale for using rhetorical, democratic, civic debate to validate comprehensive writing assessments (Broad and Boyd 2005, 13). After all, assessment validity is, in fact, "a quality of the decisions people make" (Broad 2003, 10). *Stalions*

INTERCHAPTER

Barry's inclusive, collaborative DCM assessment endeavors at MMCC in the last chapter parallel Jane and Maureen's communal assessment methods at UNR in the next. At both institutions, the DCM processes involved multiple in-house stakeholders, and ultimately, led to published reports for external audiences. While Barry's DCM study constructed shared institutional assessment values and tools, Jane and Maureen's DCM study produced mutual general education assessment values and tools. Just as Barry created an assessment model that links programmatic and classroom goals, Jane and Maureen strove to close the loop between administrative and pedagogical objectives. (Stalions)

In the other four institutional projects discussed in the book, the local situation is primary. The examples from UNR show some similar issues: creating a community of readers, dealing with administrative mandates, and establishing protocols that fit the local context. Some of their adjustments specific to UNR are worth further discussion and review as potential practices that can be exported to other situations. Their "Star Rubric" and two-hour reading limits are worth serious review and research in other institutions. They are examples of the rich and variable assessment practices created through dialogue and local ingenuity that might also be part of regional and national dialogue about best assessment practices. (Alford)

4

DESIGNS ON ASSESSMENT

University of Nevada, Reno

Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride

LOCAL CONTEXT

The University of Nevada, Reno is the state's flagship research university, with a long tradition of excellence in providing a liberal arts education. At most recent count, about 15,000 students are enrolled (about 12,000 undergraduate and 3,000 graduate). Its "vertical" Core curriculum was created/elaborated over a number of years beginning in the 1980s, with first-year math and writing courses, a three-course humanities sequence, distribution requirements in fine arts, social sciences, and sciences, and junior- and senior-level general and major capstone courses as writing-intensive, culminating experiences.

The Core writing program administers a three-course sequence. By standardized test scores, students initially place in English 098 (Preparatory College Writing), English 101 (Beginning College Writing), or English 102 (Intermediate College Writing). Since we think that students' actual writing provides a better indicator of their proficiency and practical experience, we also have an alternative portfolio placement process wherein students compile a collection of at least three samples of their best recent writing. Students may also place into or out of English 102 by their scores on advanced placement exams.

English 102 is the course required by the Core curriculum, and students must pass it to enroll in the Core humanities sequence and move on through to the capstone portion of their general education requirements. In English 101, students gain greater experience with the writing process, peer reviewing, focusing their writing on topics, reading critically, analyzing and shaping their writing for a variety of rhetorical situations, and understanding writing genres and conventions. Building on this experience, English 102 challenges students to conduct research and to craft arguments based on evidence; this course is one in "general composition," to the extent that it doesn't take a discipline-specified approach, and that it emphasizes flexibility of response to a variety of writing contexts and conventions. The course is theme-based, with no set reader, rhetoric,

handbook, nor syllabus—each instructor designs his or her course around the program’s student learning outcomes for English 102. The program runs just under one hundred sections of English 102 per year (with about the same number of English 101 sections, thirty-five sections of English 098, and a handful of English as a Second Language, honors, and other special courses). The teaching community at UNR is a mix of full-time faculty, teaching assistants (in writing/rhetoric and composition, literature, and literature and environment), and contingent faculty (temporary full-time lecturers and part-time instructors).

Under the leadership of Kathy Boardman, the Core writing program conducted a comprehensive portfolio assessment of the English 102 course in 2000, with a follow-up study in 2001 that focused on a few features that the initial study had revealed as possible areas for improvement in the curriculum. This was well in advance of our accrediting body’s new interest in assessment, and Kathy’s “closing of the loop” by changing instructor preparation and inservice training provided an impressive model of effective assessment practice.

Our Assessment Project’s Rhetorical Situation: A Comedy Of Expectations

Jane Detweiler took over leadership of the Core writing program in the summer of 2004, just shortly after the new director of the Core curriculum assumed his position. Amidst the usual pratfalls of beginning work in an administrative position, she realized that the Core director had designs—assessment project designs.

In a meeting that first fall semester, anticipating the accreditation cycle which would begin with a self-study in 2006-07, the Core director explained that he wanted to design and implement an assessment of the Core curriculum as a whole. As one might expect, he had already encountered a number of frustrations. The math and science departments were still in the midst of substantial restructuring of their programs; along with the social sciences, they plead inadequate time to prepare a curriculum *and* do an assessment of that curriculum. These disciplines would only be able to muster something like surveys of the “match” of student and teacher expectations for specific courses (read: substantive assessment in these disciplines would have to wait.) In areas of the core where curriculum was not undergoing wholesale revision, assessment would be more feasible and more necessary, given the upcoming accreditation. Hence, the Core curriculum director approached the directors of programs in Core writing and Core humanities, as well as the chair of the capstone committee, to propose a “vertical” assessment of general education: a study of writing and critical thinking in first-year writing, humanities, and the general capstones.

What follows is the Core writing program administrator's recollection of the dialogue (emphatically not verbatim, with events condensed, stylized, or omitted to suit her purposes as the teller of this tale):

Core Curriculum Director: What I would like to do is to conduct a longitudinal study that would follow a cohort of students from Core writing through to the general capstones, using e-portfolios as data. I would like to study writing and critical thinking in English 102, the Core humanities sequence, and in those junior- and senior-level capstone courses.

Core Writing Program Administrator, thinking to herself, explicating his simple declarations over the next few seconds: What? E-portfolios? I haven't heard about any e-portfolios. . . . You want to assess writing AND critical thinking? I was planning to assess my program, but you want me to collaborate with all those other departments across the disciplines? This had damned well better not turn out to be a value-added kind of assessmentHow in the heck do I assess critical thinking? I mean, it's part of what we do, but I've never learned about how to do assessment of THAT. Do you have any idea how hard this is going to be, and how much money it will cost? And keeping a "cohort" is harder than you think. Given just regular attrition, you're going to lose your cohort in no time, and the students don't take the courses in sequence or over a predictable number of years . . . it'll be seven or eight years before all of them complete everything . . . and, wait a minute, are you going to ask their permission to use their work? This whole e-portfolio databasing of student work is kind of creepy, especially if they don't know that we're using their work for assessment. And you want this done in what time-frame? The self-study is only a couple of years away!

Core Writing Program Administrator, aloud: But the accreditation visit will be in 2007-08, which means that we need results in 2006-07 for the self-study. And, as far as I know, there are no e-portfolios going on in Core writing or in Core humanities.

Core Curriculum Director: Right. So we can only *start* the longitudinal study, planning and getting the e-portfolios under way. In the meantime, we can do 'snapshots' of writing and critical thinking in English 102, Core humanities, and the general capstones. The faculty in each program will need to develop an assessment project that is 'local,' that examines how *they* teach and evaluate writing and critical thinking . . .

To his credit, the Core curriculum director steadfastly funded the locally-developed assessment projects he requested, using a line built into the general education program budget for this purpose. There were only the most

minor stumbles as he tried to shepherd along various local, faculty-driven assessment projects, like when he mused, “And, since they know how to assess writing, the faculty in English can figure out how to assess writing in the other areas . . . ”

Core Writing Program Administrator, worrying about how this conflicts with context-sensitive assessment, among other things, she points to her desk in the corner: You know, I have a day job. If you want me to assess other programs, that would be a full-time job in itself—what Core writing duties do you want me to let go, to make time for your larger study? All of them? I am ready and willing to *collaborate* with other program directors on a larger general education assessment, and to get cracking on the ‘snapshot’ you want me to do

Following these conversations, and over the course of several others, the Core curriculum director and his Core writing program administrator came to an agreement about what was feasible, given the timeframe and other constraints. The Core writing program administrator arranged to run a graduate-level internship in program assessment in the spring semester, for which she hastily assembled a packet of background readings and acquired two recent books on writing program assessment: Bob Broad’s *What We Really Value* (2003) and Brian Huot’s *(Re)articulating Writing Assessment* (2002). She planned that her graduate students would help design and implement an assessment project, in much the same way that Kathy Boardman’s crew of interns had done years previously.

Designs on Assessment at UNR

As the UNR team began designing a portfolio assessment project intended to measure a general education program’s success in preparing students to write effectively and think critically, we faced a number of difficult considerations. Perhaps the biggest challenge was our relative lack of experience with writing assessment and our even greater unfamiliarity with assessment of critical thinking. Still, we had the strong (financial and logistical) support of a Core curriculum director and an English department that valued our contribution to improving writing instruction for the roughly three thousand students who would pass through some or all of our three-course sequence in a given year.

In spring 2005, the Core writing program administrator and six interns⁴ initiated their project, emphasizing an intensive study of the latest in

4. The project described in this chapter benefited from the contributions of the interns who participated in the assessment coursework (Meg Cook, Michaela Koenig, Kara Moloney, and Eliot Rendleman), some of whom also later acted as the graduate assessment coordinators. Maureen McBride, Sarah Perrault, and Doug Walls helped to implement the project as designed, to interpret the results, and to write up the final report.

writing assessment, including recent assessments that focused on critical thinking (specifically, the work of Bill Condon and Diane Kelly-Riley at Washington State). Although we used Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) as a starting point, our descriptions of critical thinking (and ultimately the features we identified as “critical thinking” features) were developed in our focus groups from the language that our instructors had used to describe critical thinking.

The six interns divvied up the background resources into broad areas, annotating key studies and sharing them via web courseware. Seeking to understand what would be a useful model, they also studied carefully the report and process records from Kathy Boardman’s study (2000), and inquired further from her as necessary.

Their deliberations centered on some central insights:

- As Huot (2002) persuasively suggests, assessment should be a locally-driven, contextually-situated *rhetorical* enterprise, designed with the needs and interests of various audiences in mind.
- As Broad (2003) illustrates with his study, whatever assessment activities are to be conducted, they should begin with efforts to describe carefully and thoroughly what teachers in the program value and should result in representations that are useful and valid to those teachers.
- As Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) point out, writing and critical thinking do not necessarily absolutely coincide (a piece of writing *can* be an effective response to an assignment and not demonstrate critical thinking at all).
- As Boardman’s group found (2000), the information that those in the field found compelling and useful was not necessarily what central administration would find compelling and useful (indeed, it seemed that some “up the food chain” needed to be regularly reminded that an assessment *had* been conducted in the Core curriculum).

Further, the team had to bear in mind some central tasks or constraints:

- To design a study that would be a valid assessment
- To meet the demands of a key stakeholder (the Core curriculum director) and assess “writing” and “critical thinking” in English 102
- To link the program’s outcomes for English 102 to Core curriculum-level outcomes in general education

- To propose a study with a reasonable-but-substantial-enough budget
- To complete the study in the time allotted (a little over one year from design to implementation to reporting of results)

Fairly early in the design process, the team encountered some difficulties that would need to be resolved for the assessment project to move forward. First, although there were plenty of materials that described the Core curriculum, there were no Core outcomes *per se*. In the accessible archives around the office were mission statements, program descriptions, course outlines, and even some self-study documents related to the Core curriculum. The writing program had its own course outcomes, designed to move students toward our definition of “effective writing” (which was the only apparent “outcome” articulated for Core writing in the Core curriculum documents). At the level of the general education program across the university, there were no measurable outcomes. The Core writing program administrator sought to move the Core board (the committee overseeing general education) to articulate Core outcomes (this finally occurred in late fall 2005 and early spring 2006—well after the design process for the assessment was completed).

A second difficulty arose as the team considered how to make any case that the Core writing program’s teachers were meeting the expectations of our external audience of central administrators. Broad’s arguments (2003) that we should carefully describe and document what we valued were profoundly compelling, and his thorough approach—*dynamic criteria mapping or DCM*—offered an exemplary way to begin the sort of contextually-valid, locally-driven assessment Huot advocates (2002). As we looked at the actual criteria map that resulted from Broad’s study of a writing program, though, it seemed to us that a description like that would not be recognizable as the result of an assessment. It would be immensely useful to us as a teaching community, but in that form, it wouldn’t easily allow for evaluation of a program’s success.

This question of how to work with a map was one we confronted at IUPUI. When we tried to create one collaboratively with our writing program colleagues, we found that the complexity Bob Broad (2003) had represented in his map was missing in ours because as our faculty worked to create a graphic representation of our values, they also worked to simplify the result. Apparently, their previous experience with graphic representations of important ideas prompted this simplification. Later, as we worked toward a grading document we all could use, many asked, “Where is the rubric?” *Harrington and Weeden*

We found ourselves in a quandary: Broad (2003) quite rightly faults universalized, de-contextualized rubrics used nationwide for assessment projects, but our own community had a tradition of assessment using a rubric that had been drawn from our “local” course outcomes. Was this home-grown rubric subject to the same critiques? To add another wrinkle: the results of past assessment activity apparently had not been particularly interpretable by external audiences (aside from supporting assertions that “assessment activity has been taking place”).

Boardman and her team (2000) had definitely used the assessment project’s findings to improve teacher preparation and other program functions, and their rubric was a well-designed, comprehensive measurement tool for study of Core writing courses. Yet their findings had not been received and used beyond the program—how could we avoid this pitfall?

A third difficulty presented itself as the team studied the Boardman rubric in light of the Core director’s mandate that both *writing* and *critical thinking* be examined. While this tool was extremely effective as a measure of writing, it did not specifically focus on *critical thinking*. When Diane Kelly-Riley visited UNR in spring 2005, she emphasized the need to develop operational definitions of this concept for each field or discipline, and described in some detail the process of articulating just what, exactly, a given community considered this intellectual activity or creative activity to be. The Core curriculum mission statements and other materials described “critical thinking” to be a key goal, but didn’t really articulate measurable student outcomes by which the general education effort to teach critical thinking might be evaluated. Initially, the Core writing assessment team followed Boardman’s team in understanding critical thinking to be manifested broadly but measurably as “critical reading” and “rhetorical awareness.” Drawing on the experience of the Washington State University Critical Thinking Project (2002), the Core writing assessment team worked to create additional, more narrowly-specified locally-valid, contextually-sound, measurable definitions of habits of mind we could designate as “critical thinking.” At the same time, the team worked to reconcile the local, highly-contextualized rubric used in past program assessments with Broad’s (2003) more recent theoretical discussions about the limitations of rubrics.

After much discussion, deliberation, and design process, we arrived at what we considered a productive middle ground: in addition to providing a process for describing a community’s values with regard to writing, *dynamic criteria mapping* (DCM) might provide a process for developing and validating the contextual soundness of any measurement tool; for purposes of our local effort, this process might result in a rubric that might allow easier “translation” of our community’s criteria (what we value with regard to writing and critical thinking) for external audiences post-assessment. So,

we decided to use DCM to describe what we valued in writing and critical thinking, to map our criteria for that valuing, and to work toward a measurement tool (*even a rubric*, possibly) that we could use to talk with administrators and students about *what we really valued* in Core writing.

The challenges faced here by our UNR colleagues about how to use DCM, to what purposes, for what audiences, and at what moments resonate strongly with our own processes. As an active, collaborative, process-embracing practice, DCM helps give a rich shape to uncovering communally held values. As a rhetorical construct, the maps play an altogether different role. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

WHAT WE REALLY DESIGNED

DCM had encouraged us to work from within. We wanted our assessment to be connected with the 2000 assessment conducted by Boardman and to reflect current values of our instructors. To access what our instructors valued in March 2005, we conducted an informal survey based on the 2000 assessment rubric features. The survey asked instructors to rate sixteen features on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest). Instructors were also asked to describe what they value in student writing, how they recognize critical thinking in student writing, and what a successful paper for our English 102 course might be. The response rate was a depressing twenty percent. Even with the low participation, we took the responses and started to discuss which features from the 2000 study were still valued, which features could be combined, and which features needed to be added.

To get more detailed responses and to nurture a sense of inclusion, we decided to hold focus groups with instructors. Initially, we held two sessions in May of 2005. Twelve instructors participated in the two sessions, primarily graduate teaching assistants and part-time lecturers (who cover the majority of our core writing courses). These sessions were primarily designed to open up discussions about what our instructors valued in writing for our English 102 course.

One of our primary fears was that instructors would feel attacked by the assessment and resist participating in the process, so we tried to provide a space for instructors to discuss their perceptions of assessment. We used the focus groups as the opportunity to voice these concerns about assessment by having small groups of instructors create movie posters depicting visual representations of assessment.

To complete this project, members of each group had to discuss their perceptions of assessment and agree on the representation. We then let the other members of the focus group interpret the movie poster before allowing the designers to discuss their process. The movie posters ranged

from large brains in a high noon showdown to robotic monsters attacking a piece of writing. This activity was fun, funny, and allowed instructors to let go of their negative views of assessment and work toward creating an assessment process that they valued. After presenting the visual aspects of the posters and allowing participants to discuss what they disliked about “assessment,” we moved the discussion toward what they valued in writing.

Jane and Maureen’s movie poster activity provides a DCM heuristic for uncovering educators’ values about writing. DCM-inspired activities are inherently visual, and they provide alternatives to traditional interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. DCM-driven methods, such as this movie poster activity, make visible aspects of rhetorical values that traditional research methods may not be able to reveal. In fact, Broad (personal communication, October 6, 2006) explained that UNR’s innovative application of DCM reveals educators’ “latent rhetorical values” using a “psychoanalytical approach.” *Stalions*

The participating instructors engaged in small-group discussions of what they valued in student writing, what they wanted from their students, and what they looked for when assessing student writing. As the discussions developed, a recorder tried to capture the essential features identified during the discussion. Each small group’s list of features was discussed with the entire group to ensure accuracy and involvement. Following this discussion, participants were asked to review samples of student writing and identify what they valued and found problematic in each sample. Each participant read the samples silently, marking comments and writing notes. Small group discussions and then a large group share were used to open up discussions about values connected with instructors’ assessments. A comparison between the features initially identified by the instructors, and those they had marked positively or negatively in student samples revealed that evaluating writing created complications in our process. When the instructors were discussing the writing features they identified in the student samples, the discussion moved toward features that were easily identifiable. What participants could see in the student samples did not always align with the values of writing the group had initially identified. To bring all of the ideas together, the entire group generated another list of values associated with writing. There were many overlaps in the features, but it was important to us to capture the language that instructors were using, so all features were recorded using the language of individual instructors.

From these lists and the discussion, participants were asked to design an assessment tool to evaluate student writing. The word “rubric” was purposefully avoided, to allow participants to think outside of that form, to

allow the possibility of dynamic criteria mapping to emerge. The guidelines were purposefully vague. Some instructors asked if this was meant to be a rubric. The basic response was that the instructors should design a tool that would help them assess student writing based on their personal lists of values. Some participants worked individually; others formed pairs or small groups. The assessment tools that participants created resembled traditional rubrics, though the lists were color-coded in neon or had elaborate groupings of features.

The fact that faculty wanted the new instrument to be called a rubric, and even to look like a rubric, suggests how deeply rubrics are embedded in the culture of writing assessment. We saw this, too, at IUPUI. Moving from rubrics to something else can prove difficult. *Harrington and Weeden*

Other tools listed and coded features. Some assessment tools were extremely simple, listing only five to ten features. Participants created flow chart tools, descriptive paragraphs, and a cluster of star patterns with features written between arrows or along the lines of the star.

With all of the information gathered from the initial focus groups, the assessment team reviewed the posters, the lists of values, and the various assessment tools. From these documents and the responses to the survey, we developed a “rubric” draft. This initial draft had twelve features, which was a reduction from the 2000 survey’s sixteen scored features and three comment features. Features were easily identified: many features reverberated throughout the process; however, the idea of visual form became a conversation. Part of the discussion about visual representation of the features was in response to the assessment team’s discussions of the hierarchical structure of the 2000 rubric that seemed to privilege the initial features. The top-down structure of the 2000 rubric also seemed to leave little room for assessment readers wishing to start anywhere other than the top and move through the features. Responding to various patterns of the focus groups’ imaginative assessment tools and some of the assessment team’s doodlings, the fairly-final draft rubric assumed a star shape: a group of numbered rays, one for each “feature area,” linked at zero and radiating outward to the maximum score of six. (See figure 1.)

This star shape seemed to us deeply appropriate, since it reflected our community’s sense that all the aspects of writing we were describing were integrally linked, inseparable, flowing together. The rubric also allowed a way to evaluate writing (in a shorthand way, to be sure) and generate numbers to translate our findings for external audiences. When a portfolio was scored using the chart, and lines drawn to connect the hatchmarks on each of the rays, we would have a visual representation suggesting the

“shape” of the whole (higher scores all around would make a “fuller” circle around the star; an area of lower scores would appear as a divot or flattening in that circle).

The star-shaped rubric presents a rubric/DCM hybrid assessment tool; this rubric incorporates features of a traditional rubric; however, this rubric becomes a full or misshapen circle depending upon how evaluators connect the hatchmarks in judging portfolios. In his introduction, Broad explained that “the rubricity or non-rubricity of the results was not of prime importance” in the DCM endeavors discussed in this book. *Stalions*

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the star-shaped chart helped us to avoid privileging some aspects of writing over others. Unlike typical rating sheets, which list features to be scored from top to bottom and from one page to the next, the star allowed readers to see the whole rating system at once on one page, and to begin their evaluation wherever they wished on the star diagram. Somehow, the thing just fit the way we wanted to guide our process of evaluation for the project.

In the fall of 2005, we facilitated two additional focus groups to help us refine the assessment tool and to keep instructors involved in the development process. The first of these test-runs had participants applying the rubric to samples of student writing. We opened the focus group with instructors sharing their initial reactions to the rubric.

We were concerned about how instructors would react to the star shape that had emerged from our earlier processes. We began the focus group with a brief discussion of first impressions of the rubric, and then participants wrote about their responses to the rubric. Most of the responses were immediately positive—especially from group participants who had designed a star-shaped representation in the initial focus groups. One remarked, “I think that it is something that can be worked with rather easily and guide response,” while another added, “Circular design allows some representation of values that are discipline-specific and those that cross disciplines.” We did have a few participants who expressed concern about the design being too complicated. A participant wrote, “Initially, the diagram looked a bit confusing, but after explanation of its use, it appears quite simple, straight-forward” and another agreed, “Looks complicated at first glance, but makes more sense as I begin to understand how it will be used and applied.” After this initial exercise, participants read student samples and scored two student papers using the rubric. Participants discussed their scores and comments in small groups. There was a lot of discussion in the small groups about overlaps in features and potential difficulties

assessing entire portfolios using the rubric. Small groups tended to focus on features that were either very apparent in the student writing or obviously absent.

As a larger group, we discussed general impressions and had discussions about overlapping feature descriptions that had led to varying interpretations of features. At this point in the process, participants discussed the importance of the feature that rated whether a student's writing fulfilled the requirements of the teacher's assignment (which we planned to include in the portfolios during scoring). Where the needs of a *program* assessment dictated solely a focus on the students' work as representing how well both teachers and students were working toward meeting stated course outcomes, these readers (as teachers themselves) felt it was important that they evaluate how well the writing answered an assignment (much as they would do in grading their own students' writing in a class). As a compromise position, the assessment team decided not to include the "answers assignment" feature as a scored item, but to offer space for discursive commentary on this aspect of portfolios on a "comment only" page.

The tool was revised based on participants' comments: some features were combined (specifically features that addressed focus and purpose), while other features were given fuller descriptions (features such as "problem and its complexities" and "rhetorical awareness" received more descriptors to help our readers recognize the features in student writing). In some cases, at this stage, we borrowed *names* for features (some of the critical thinking features, for example, were based on Condon and Kelly-Riley's rubric [2004], and some of the writing features were borrowed from Boardman's previous assessment project at UNR). These we carefully combined with feature *descriptions* from what teachers said in focus groups, making sure to use the language that was most identifiable to our instructors.

A final focus group session was held to dry-run the assessment reading planned for spring 2006. Timing issues and scoring variances were of particular interest to us for the planning of the official assessment. Participants applied the revised rubric to student portfolios. We had a discussion about usability of the rubric for portfolios, visual design, specific features, and general responses to the process. During this discussion, participants brought up many important considerations, such as the influence on portfolio evaluators of instructors' grading criteria as presented on assignment sheets (which we planned to remove from the portfolios to be scored). This final focus group helped us to narrow our features down to nine scored features and three comment-only features.

Participation in the focus groups was essential to the process of our assessment. There has been a true buy-in to the assessment, and to the rubric specifically, among focus group participants. Since the initial

presentation of the rubric to instructors, feedback has been extremely positive. Instructors in the final focus groups have even changed their own classroom/student assessments to be more reflective of their values and those listed on the rubric. Initial participation was basically induced through bribes of food and a small stipend to each participant; however, instructors then began to ask to participate to gain experience with assessment and to participate in discussions about evaluation of writing with other instructors.

UNR's inclusive, collaborative assessment endeavors produced ample opportunities for faculty to develop collegiality. Broad (2003) explained that criteria mapping "offers tremendous potential for writing instructors' professional growth and feeling of professional community" (121). *Stalions*

The initial focus groups were a starting point to introduce instructors to an assessment process that listened to instructors' values, incorporated their ideas into the assessment plan, and sought their feedback throughout the process. The focus groups were the foundation for creating our "rubric" or assessment tool. Wording for features and the descriptions for each feature were taken directly from focus group participants' feedback, to encourage instructors to identify with the features and with what each feature would look like in student writing.

Obviously, an assessment tool was created through the focus group process; however, the groups also offered our department and instructors time to look at their own processes and at how their pedagogical approaches fit into the department. Feedback from participants include comments such as: "I thought that this assessment focus group was most beneficial in how participants more clearly articulate the diverse values we bring with us to the classroom as an instructor;" and "I think this focus group experience will be beneficial to my teaching practices, in addition to being beneficial to the Core writing program. . . . It reminded me of the values I hold for writing, and how I need to improve my assignments and class discussions in order to meet those values and writing goals. . . . It also made me conscious of values and practices I held/hold but haven't noticed/don't notice."

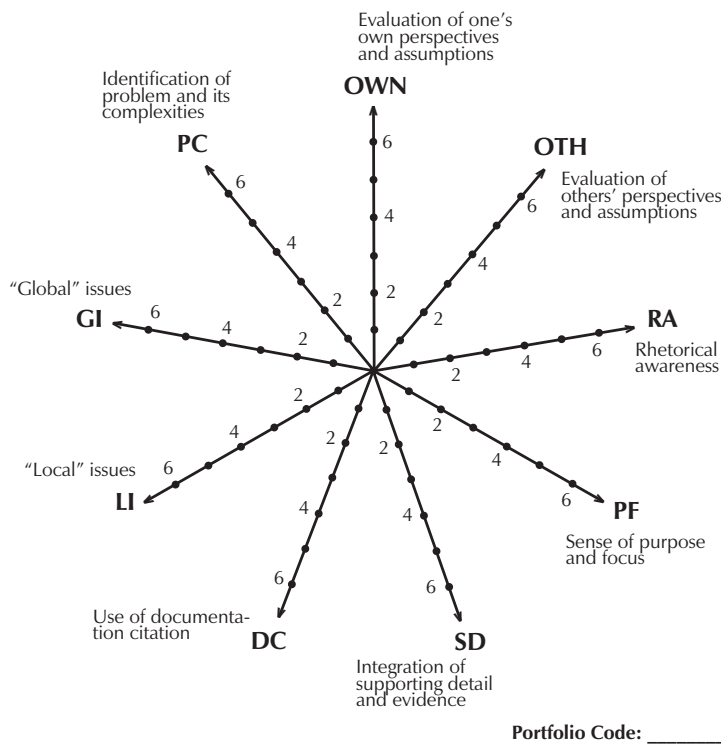
The process that evolved was certainly inspired by DCM even if the final product is not the sort of criteria map Broad (2003) produced based on his study. It is the organic nature of DCM that we applied in our assessment design process. We have basically produced a non-traditional rubric, but this is what came from the instructors in the program. And they own the rubric. They connect with the star pattern and features. The rubric also allows us to take our outcomes to administrators in terms that they

can identify with (the numbers, of course, along with very condensed versions of our extensive descriptions of “what we value in writing”) and translate to their audiences as well. Just as we could report to our external audiences the precise ways that the program appeared to be succeeding “by the numbers,” so our external audiences could also point to how the program, a key part of the Core curriculum, appeared to be accomplishing some of the stated goals of UNR’s general education effort.⁵

The Rubric

The rubric is a nine-pointed star. Each axis represents one of the nine scored features, and there are six scores (1-6) marked on each axis.

Fig 1. Nine-pointed Star



- As is noted above, the Core outcomes came after much of the design stage for the assessment project. Once these outcomes were articulated, they established that the Core writing program provides a crucial introduction to writing process and experience with conventions of various writing communities (Core Curriculum Outcome #1), as well as practice with research process and effective argumentation (Core Curriculum Outcome #2). With our assessment project, we demonstrated that the writing and critical thinking involved in these curricular objectives could be systematically described and measured, with statistically significant results. The team was invited to present our study at a regional assessment conference, at which we assisted other departments with beginning the process of describing what they valued in student writing and other work.

Readers marked a score for each of the nine features, with half-scores allowed between any scores except 3 and 4. In other words, a valid score might be a whole number such as 4, or a half number such as 4.5, but it could not be a 3.5. Readers were told not to use 3.5 in order to encourage them to make a judgment by choosing one of the middle scores on the continuum instead of opting for the exact halfway mark.

The Comment Sheet

The comment sheet had spaces for three comment-only features⁶, and three blank spaces for writing comments on scored features. Readers used the comment-only features areas to comment on issues they noticed but were not taking into account while scoring portfolios. Readers used the three blank spaces to comment on scored features. For example, a reader wanting to make notes about a writer's use of documentation and citation (DC) would write "DC" in the left-hand column and the comment in the right-hand column.

Both UNR and EMU have an interesting outcome from DCM: an approach to rating portfolios that is easy to use yet generates rich descriptive data. Both systems are wonderful illustrations of the creativity that emerges from the notion that a single score from a single rubric must be the summary of an assessment. Both programs encourage the use of numerical data or check-off sheets to provide some stability across readers, and both programs encourage the use of short, open-ended assessment spaces to allow readers to provide unique commentary on each portfolio. These systems are easy for readers to use, and they preserve the complexity of reading and judging writing. *Harrington and Weeden*

The Feature Descriptions

To help readers use the rubric and the comment sheet, we also provided a scoring guide. This matrix contained descriptors generated by teachers as we designed the rubric (e.g., "avoids easy dichotomies" or "develops a line of thought"), combined with brief descriptors for the six-point rating scale (e.g., "4 = fully meets the requirements of the feature").

-
6. The "Comment Only" section contained spaces for the following kinds of response: 1) Requirements of Assignment: Addresses assignment; form and format; 2) General comments regarding how assignment addresses requirements; 3) Overall Portfolio: Sense of the writer (i.e. experiments, plays. makes conscious choices, breaks with convention intentionally, shows engagement); overall impression of the portfolio and writing samples; general comments on your overall impression of the portfolio; 4) Anomaly/Outlier: Not applicable to the English 102 portfolio assessment; not enough evidence to draw any conclusions; general comments on why assignment(s) cannot be scored or does not seem applicable to assessment.

WHAT HAPPENED: INTERPRETATIONS AND MORE INTERPRETATIONS

With our non-traditional, now-validated rubric in hand, in late spring 2006 we began ramping up for the actual portfolio readings in early summer. Our primary goals—since we already had selected our readers—were preparing the community for the logistical challenges of portfolio collection and the readers for the rigors of the actual evaluation process (slated to take place over five days just after semester’s end).

We held two hour-long information sessions to further allay fears and explain, over and over, the details of the collection process. Teachers were encouraged, not required, to attend—and we made sure that all the information was conveyed multiple ways (over email, in hard copy, in person). In every case, we tried to reassure members of the community that this was indeed a *program assessment*, and not an evaluation of them as individual teachers.

As might be predicted, there were concerns logistical (“What do you do if the randomly-selected students dropped?”), practical (“What if the random selection only selected the students who were doing poorly?”), and protective (“How will you NOT know the student’s name, or mine?”). The assessment team patiently explained that the selection process contained a healthy margin for attrition (choose five, need to net three from each section), and that, because the selection *was* random, it would necessarily mean that all students were equally likely to have their work included in the sample. Even more patiently, we detailed how portfolios and the attendant assignments would have identifying information removed (the instructors could even do it themselves, and just note the student’s identification number) and a code number applied for tracking purposes during the actual portfolio evaluation readings.

Our patience and diligence were rewarded when, in early May, one hundred percent of our instructors submitted at least the minimum of three student portfolios. Only three out of thirty-nine instructors handed in portfolios after the deadline; of those, two had notified us in advance that the portfolios would be late. The portfolio assessment team took particular pride in this response, feeling that we had managed to reassure our colleagues that this was indeed a *program assessment*.

The actual readings proceeded very smoothly. Ten readers met for six days. We held norming sessions on the Thursday before the official reading week began, and on the first two mornings (Monday and Tuesday) during the reading week. Norming (training readers to evaluate consistently and according to the stated criteria) also took place on the Thursday of the reading week. For norming activities, readers were given copies of “spare” portfolios (these were complete, processed portfolios from each class

beyond the three “have-to-haves”). For each portfolio, the readers each did a separate assessment, then discussed their scores on each feature. The Thursday norming session also allowed the assessment team to do some final fine-tuning of the wording in the feature descriptions, while the discussions allowed readers to discover when their understanding of the feature descriptions was different from their peers’ understanding.

Perhaps more important than the precise details of the norming sessions was our insight that readers’ scoring became more divergent after the first two hours of reading, converged again after the lunch break for another couple of hours, then diverged more wildly as the afternoon wore on. Once we figured this out, the two-hour reading periods became the rule, and we strongly emphasized taking breaks and quitting soon after the day’s second reading period.

According to standard portfolio evaluation procedure, the reading process ensured that each portfolio was read at least twice, with discrepancies of more than one point on any one feature (out of nine) prompting a third reading. With our norming, our “two-hour-insight,” and, perhaps most important, a rubric that was contextually well-validated, we managed to achieve an inter-rater reliability of .77.

RESULTS AND WHAT WE MAKE OF THEM: NUMBERS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Now that we had all kinds of numbers; what in the heck did they mean? Not being true measurement-types, we turned to a colleague from the Math and Statistics Department, Danelle Clark, for help in analyzing the data we had generated. With her able assistance, we tried to get a general sense of how students were doing *on average* in the writing and critical thinking activities demarcated by our key features. She determined whether the scores on each feature were normally distributed (they were), and whether the differences between the feature scores were indeed real differences (they were), and proceeded apace with other tests to check for statistically significant relationships between sample scores (and found some interesting correlations).

Careful consideration of the numbers on our key writing features suggested that the UNR Core writing program has been generally fairly successful.

In addition to qualitative studies, DCM facilitates quantitative analyses. Broad (2003), for instance, calculated criteria frequencies in addition to producing qualitative criteria maps. In addition, *Stalions* (2007) calculated the approximate frequencies of placement evaluators’ criteria use, which were depicted in qualitative/quantitative criteria maps. *Stalions*

The readers assessed 192 portfolios, or fourteen percent of the 1,379 students in English 102, and sample mean scores ranged from a low of 3.6 to a high of 4.0, on a scale of 1-6 with 6 as the highest score.

We decided to pair the numbers with some careful, detailed descriptions of a range of portfolios, chosen for aggregate or “overall” average scores ranging from low to high on the six-point rating scale we had used for scoring the nine features.

We also did linear regression analysis, checking whether there were any statistically significant relationships between pairs of features. When these correlations were displayed in a matrix, we noted that there was a small cluster of pairs that seemed to be highly correlated (above .75, or closest to 1.00). Making a command decision, we decided that these were statistically significant correlations—and the more scatter-plotted, less-well-correlated pairs were not.

With all the numbers and some useful analyses in hand, we prepared to argue that the results of our study suggested that most English 102 students were adequately competent or more than competent in the kinds of writing and critical thinking activities that the assessment measured. As compared with previous Core writing assessments, the assessment team was able to evaluate more, and more specified, domains of critical thinking, and fewer, less specified aspects of writing, with the newly-designed rubric.

Since statistical tests determined that the various features were normally distributed, we felt that the findings warranted some cautious claims about how current students were doing or similar students would do “on average.” To make our case, we drew together the results of both the scoring and the statistical analysis, and made some specific observations.

We decided to make a series of points, using the scores. As soon as our number-laden charts were complete, instructors were invited to come and offer comment and interpretation before we took our assessment show on the road (a few buildings over, for a command performance at a meeting of the Core board). The assessment team facilitated a lively discussion of the data, took notes on the commentary, and wove the community’s interpretations into a final report.

WHAT DID IT MEAN? SHAPING A REPORT

When we began to prepare our report, we anticipated the needs of various audiences.

DCM can feel unwieldy, and overly focused on process, input, and conversation. However, as Detweiler and McBride report here, the result of this kind of careful process is that assessment takes on a life of its own: it feels truly collaborative. The lively discussions with different groups of interested parties (or stakeholders, as we call them) are one of many significant benefits. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

The teachers in our community might want more details about the process of the project, or the actual numbers on the various features. Some other readers, like local secondary teachers and students, might be studying our website for insights into what we teach (and value) at UNR. Certainly, the director of the Core curriculum had indicated an interest in a careful descrip-

Jane and Maureen anticipated the needs of various interested audiences--teachers, students, scholars, professionals, and external stakeholders. They anticipated and constructed what Ruth Ray (1993) coined "local knowledge,...knowledge for the community of teachers within one's department, school, community, district, or state" (86), and "global knowledge,...knowledge...for the field of composition" (90). *Stalions*

tion of the validation process, the results, and the implications we drew from our findings. He wanted the report to be a model for other disciplines (no pressure there) that might also want to adopt a portfolio evaluation process for their assessment efforts. The report has since been forwarded "up the chain," containing detailed discussion of process and results, and has provided information useful in the accreditation process, as well as in ongoing discussions of curriculum changes proposed in response to the growing population of incoming students who need developmental writing courses.

In the main report, we offered an interpretation of the numbers and an evaluative description of several portfolios, to lend a sense of what the numbers "might look like" for the readers. We then developed different versions, some of which would be made available on the program website for local teachers, students, and other interested parties. In preparing the report, we also generated other versions of the information that would be potentially publishable in the profession's journals and in collections like this one.⁷

Since Kathy Boardman and her 2000/2001 assessment team had done extensive linking of substantial reader comments with specific scores, our assessment team did not necessarily need to do this kind of qualitative documentation again. Further, our mandate was to study writing *and* critical thinking; hence, we focused on developing and validating constructs for this kind of assessment. Without Boardman's substantial qualitative data, however, the team felt the need to be especially careful about making

7. We decided that we would be very careful in circulating details of the rubric and scoring sheet, since we are committed to contextually-valid assessment. To encourage others to engage in developing their own assessment tools—and to discourage simple transfer and application of our rubric—we will make the rubric and feature descriptions available in carefully limited forms, and lead discussions for other groups around campus and elsewhere. In this way, we will emphasize the need for locally-developed assessment tools, and assist others in this development process.

overbroad and ungrounded statements about what any particular student would be able to do. With the quantitative analysis, our 2006 study gained in explanatory power, and lost the greater nuance and descriptive-interpretive depth of the 2000/2001 study.

To address this problem, Maureen selected portfolios representing the full range of scores, to show how well a given portfolio demonstrated the overall score range (low, mid, high) for all nine features. The portfolios that were selected did not have any discrepancies in scoring (a third reader was not needed). She read through each of the portfolios looking for features that were exemplified by the writing samples; for example, the feature for examining one's own beliefs was easily identifiable in the high-scoring portfolio. After reading through the example portfolios, comparisons were made between the score ranges. In addition to looking at individual features, the assignments and sequencing of assignments, especially for the high-scoring portfolio, were discussed.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM AND FUTURE ASSESSMENT

After the completion of the report for our administrative audiences, we developed a range of continuing projects to carry on the cycle of interpretation, evaluation, and reflective programmatic change. The most immediate projects had to do with sharing our results and revising teacher preparation in several ways.

We revised the summer orientation and the teaching practicum to reflect what we found in the course of our assessment project. Specific results and our interpretations of these became a session on "teaching critical thinking," with a special emphasis on how our programmatic focus on rhetorical awareness might be more explicitly tied to helping students demonstrate this intellectual practice. Various other sessions were similarly adapted to take advantage of patterns we discerned in the assessment data.

We held meetings in which teachers were invited to help us figure out what the numbers might mean (see the sections above for examples of how our colleagues helped us understand the numbers). These responses were folded into the final report, and into a range of other program materials.

We involved our instructors in revising teacher resources. For example, we asked for volunteers for a working group to look at examples of assignments from high-scoring (4.5 to 5.5 range overall) portfolios. We chose only high-scoring portfolios to ensure that the assessment did not become a critique of teaching. We had six volunteers meet for a Saturday with only a small bribe of homemade snacks and potential cv lines. Instructors read through six sets of assignments, making notes, commenting on similarities between assignment sequences. The findings of this working group have become a handout on

“features of assignments and sequences that invited high-scoring responses,” which has been shared with current teachers and will be crucial to preparing new teachers in the program. The discussion about the assignments led many instructors to talk about their own teaching practices, sequencing, and values for writing. In their written sign-offs, instructors said, “I found this session to be extremely helpful because it exposed me to a variety of successful assignment strategies. I think it would be helpful for instructors to see these sequences as models upon which they might base their courses, or as inspiration for designing their own sequences.”

We plan to design and conduct a study of how well English 101 articulates with English 102. While this prerequisite course has its own curricular goals, most of them point toward the required, culminating course in the sequence. Since the program seemed to have been pretty successful in teaching “rhetorical awareness”—judging by the scores on portfolios in our sample—we also might be able to emphasize critical thinking more heavily in English 101, and better prepare students for English 102. A follow-up study to see how well our articulation efforts are working is certainly in order.

We also plan to share the results of our study, as well as our process of designing and conducting it, in various forums, both on campus (at a regional assessment conference) and beyond (at the Conference on College Composition and Communication and in publications).

With these changes in teacher preparation and our various assessment working groups, we have begun to “close the loop.” We are beginning to bring the assessment back to the instructors and into the classroom.

By closing the loop between writing program administrative and pedagogical matters, Jane and Maureen’s UNR assessment model invokes what *Alford* (MMCC) calls the “fractal” nature of organic writing assessments; in other words, such an assessment model should operate at both a macro and micro level without losing its essence. *Stalions*

It is our goal to continue the conversations, allaying assessment concerns as we go, and enriching our understanding of *what we really value* in, and as, “writing” and “critical thinking” at UNR.

INTERCHAPTER

At UNR, as we report in the last chapter, our assessment was conducted at a programmatic level. We specifically avoided discussions about assessing individual students, assignments, or classes. However, in the discussion of the assessment at IUPUI that follows in chapter 5, even though their focus was on connections between assessment and grading for individual students (with some connections to program goals), the story they tell of their “Dynamic or UnRubric” is very similar to our Star Rubric story at UNR. Their initial fears that the “simplicity of rubrics hides all the messiness” was a fear that we shared. At UNR, we accounted for some of the messiness by having unscored features for our rubric that allowed assessment readers to address issues of specific assignments, courses, and/or student writers. What differentiates the UnRubric from our Star Rubric is the specific focus on describing different levels of performance. In the end, however, both of our assessments and UnRubrics share a way to assess writing organically and collaboratively. (Detweiler and McBride)

At UNR and IUPUI, Jane and Maureen and Susanmarie and Scott’s dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) work challenges the notion of rubricity. Jane and Maureen’s DCM labors grew a star-shaped rubric and Susanmarie and Scott’s DCM efforts cultivated a dynamic “UnRubric.” Due largely to their colleagues’ familiarity with rubrics and unfamiliarity with criteria maps, the authors’ DCM efforts led to more evolved, progressive rubrics, rubrics that highlighted the messy, qualitative, and complex aspects of writing— aspects simplified or ignored by rubrics historically. Like Jane and Maureen, Susanmarie and Scott encouraged their colleagues to talk about writing, and consequently, create descriptors of good writing. In particular, the UnRubric, an evaluation guide which describes subtle degrees and nuances of the qualities of portfolio writing, combines criteria mapping with the hierarchical structure of the traditional rubric. (Stalions)

“Messiness.” “Authorizing the unauthorized.” “Ethical issues.” “Honoring Conflict.” “The UnRubric.” These are words that (still) stick out to us in our re-reading of Susanmarie and Scott’s chapter. In the interest of full disclosure, we should say that we work closely with our IUPUI colleagues fairly regularly, and we know that we share a commitment to and a certain degree of pleasure in the kind of organized untidiness that is reflected in words like the ones above.

Still we are struck, yet again, as we read through this chapter by the ways that Susanmarie, Scott, and their IUPUI colleagues used DCM to tackle some of the hard, sticky, under-the-covers issues in their writing program at IUPUI. It seems to us that this use of DCM – as a way to facilitate hard conversations – is as valuable as (maybe more valuable than) the development of an assessment instrument (an UnRubric, or whatever it is that one wants to call it). Bob Broad's book is called *What We Really Value*; this chapter illustrates that, in addition to uncovering what "we" (in any context/program) value, this approach privileges a kind of conversation that we in the field of composition and rhetoric also value, a conversation about writing (and reading, and . . .) that is reflected in this chapter. (Adler-Kassner and Estrem)

5

ASSESSMENT CHANGES FOR THE LONG HAUL

*Dynamic Criteria Mapping at Indiana University Purdue
University Indianapolis*

Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden

I wonder: Could teachers gather around the great thing called “teaching and learning” and explore its mysteries with the same respect we accord any subject worth knowing? . . . Our tendency to reduce teaching to question of technique is one reason we lack a collegial conversation of much duration or depth. Though technique-talk promises the ‘practical’ solutions that we think we want and need, the conversation is stunted when technique is the only topic; the human issues in teaching get ignored, so the human beings who teach feel ignored as well.

Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

What Parker Palmer calls the mysteries of teaching and learning all seem to vanish in the moment a grade is written on a portfolio or paper. Whatever doubts we have in determining the grade, whatever combination of strengths and weaknesses have led us to decide that yes, this is a B+ (*despite the fact that the literature review depends on too many sweeping generalizations, the elegant writing style and the creative solutions that appear in your conclusion make this a strong report*) all get elided as the grade itself comes to represent the essay. “What did you get?” students ask each other after papers have been returned. “What did you give it?” we say to other faculty members when we’ve read problematic portfolios at our end-of-semester portfolio readings. So even amongst ourselves, we’re likely to elide complexities: “Look at this great paper!” Or, “what a fabulous example of an A portfolio,” we say. We let single grades or adjectives stand for a whole complex of ideas, ideas that are really taught and negotiated in community.

Grades, then, stand in for student achievement, becoming a shorthand—ideally—for all that we value in student learning and performance. Even though we know that grades don’t communicate clearly to everyone, we’re often frustrated by students who want simple explanations of how to get an A. “It’s not so simple,” we say.

In our attempts at UNR to assess our program and not just individual students or assignments, there was resistance from instructors who were so entrenched in a culture of grading that many of our discussions were about how to separate the grade for an individual assignment and the assessment of a portfolio for a programmatic assessment. As we move beyond the English 102 portfolio project and into a study of the other two Core writing courses (at the developmental and beginning levels), we are having the same conversations with a mostly-new group of instructors. These teachers also tend to conflate the evaluations in grading with those in assessment, and to resist our efforts to separate the two kinds of processes. How institutional constraints created by a system that values grades affect assessment is a worthwhile discussion. *Detweiler and McBride*

And yet so many of our approaches to grading suggest that yes, it really is that simple. Take, for example, a grading rubric used in our own program in the past few years, which identified an A portfolio as one containing, in part, (emphasis added):

Striking evidence that you think like a writer, which means that you show

- *An excellent ability* to make meaningful connections between purpose, content, and organization
- *An excellent ability* to adapt content and style to the writing situation (as defined by a particular assignment)

As opposed to a B portfolio, which contains:

Clear evidence that you think like a writer, which means that you show

- *A good ability* to make meaningful connections between purpose, content, and organization
- *A good ability* to adapt content and style to the writing situation (as defined by a particular assignment)

Or a not-quite-passing portfolio (C-), which would contain:

Some evidence that you think like a writer, although erratically and superficially, which means that you show

- *Attempts to make* meaningful connections between purpose, content, and organization with some or little success

Our rubric, although thoughtfully constructed after several months of faculty collaboration in our particular context, is not necessarily distinctive. Compare it to the 6+1 Traits rubric, which uses these levels of descriptors

for 7 factors (such as word choice, ideas, or organization). This analytic writing guide has been popularized in workshops by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), and uses these descriptors for student performance:

Wow! Exceeds expectations

- 5 *Strong:* shows control and skill in this trait; many strengths present
- 4 *Effective:* on balance, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses; a small amount of revision is needed
- 3 *Developing:* strengths and need for revision are about equal; about half-way home
- 2 *Emerging:* need for revision outweighs strengths; isolated moments hint at what the writer has in mind
- 1 *Not Yet:* a bare beginning; writer not yet in control

(www.ncrel.org/assessment/pdfrubrics/6plus1traits.pdf)

Strong-effective-developing is not so different from excellent-good-attempting to. Admittedly, the 6+1 traits rubrics hint at some complexity, for it has descriptive text for only points 1, 3, and 5 on each dimension. Trainers suggest that papers that fall “in between” the points described earn scores of 2 and 4, and the “Wow!” permits a level of enthusiasm that’s simply indescribable with the 5. Still, both rubrics present student performances as arrayed along an uncomplicated set of levels that can be described by simply varying an adjective with intensity: excellent, as opposed to good, fair as opposed to poor, and the categories of analysis (“thinking like a writer” or “word choice”) are quite general.

So what’s the problem with all this? Simply, that the simplicity of rubrics hides all the messiness, obscuring just what kind of different features combine to make “a bare beginning” or an acceptable hint of “what a writer has in mind,” or what really is the difference between an “excellent” adaptation to context or a merely “good” adaptation to context. And the appearance of the rubric makes an argument that people actually *use* the rubric, while we know that in practice, people don’t. (Yes, training can ensure that people use rubrics or be fired—witness the success of Educational Testing Service scoring sessions—but that, too, sacrifices complexity for consistency.) So the features of rubrics that seem useful—simplicity, order, consistency—would appear to make clear what is valued, yet don’t match the messy complexities of writing. There are many ways to the same end, we don’t all teach the same way, and students don’t all write the same way. Students may respond excellently to texts and arguments in myriad ways—through satire, direct engagement, storytelling—but we don’t value those alternatives equally. Thus the grades we give may not communicate well to students, or to anyone, about what a particular instructor and a particular student

valued in a given course or semester. As we coordinated a process of revising course goals in our English W131 course (Elementary Composition I), seeking to bring more flexibility to the curriculum (moving away from a common textbook and assignment series) we wanted to address the failings in rubrics. In this chapter, we revisit the process we used to address those failings and analyze the outcomes—both textual products and attitudinal shifts—of our work.

The emphasis here on how complex a rating really is (although I have to say I haven't found that many Wow!s) makes a good point. These readings are about more than evaluation; they are about the way that reading creates a context for meaning. *Alford*

Dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) seemed the best way to articulate the conflicts we saw brewing in our program, conflicts that wouldn't come out in the open so long as we had a traditional rubric that stood in the way of *unauthorized* assumptions about writing. In effect, we wanted to authorize the unauthorized, so that we could work through conversations about what we really wanted our program and course to be. We were driven in part by curricular issues—we assume it's obvious why it's important for a multi-section course to have common outcomes and standards—but also by ethical issues raised by transitions in the structure of our writing faculty.

Using an anti-PowerPoint, creating maps, and basing assessment on the dialogue of instructors can create a space for nontraditional rubrics and alternative assessment tools to evolve. Without this conscious attempt to fight against externally and institutionally sanctioned language and forms, nothing organic, not even a rubric, can emerge. *Detweiler and McBride*

LOCAL CONTEXT

IUPUI's writing program, housed in the English Department within the School of Liberal Arts, serves more than 6,000 students per year in five different introductory level courses. As a comprehensive urban university, we serve a broad range of central Indiana students. We cater to a mobile population: most of our students are commuter students, although recently more students reside on campus as we have a new set of dorms. In the past, many of the students tended to be older, returning students; more recently, we have been attracting younger students. One thing almost all our students have in common: they work an average of 30 hours per week in addition to their course loads. We're a young campus, and we're not afraid to look for creative solutions to the myriad problems affecting our students'

progress toward degrees. In short, it's an exciting place to work, with lots of energy and campus enthusiasm for writing.

IUPUI's writing program has a long history of dynamic interaction among the writing faculty, most of whom traditionally have been part-time. A small number of tenured faculty (including Susanmarie) teach courses at the various levels in the program, but first- and second-year writing has historically been taught primarily by part-time faculty and a few full-time non-tenure-track faculty. Some of these full-time instructors had advanced over time from the part-time ranks into what were then rare full-time non-tenure-track appointments (Scott, in 2000, became a full-time lecturer after two years as a part-time faculty member). In the two years prior to our DCM project, the Indiana University trustees provided funds for a large number of full-time non-tenure-track positions, changing the face of the department in two years to one that is more than half full-time non-tenure-track faculty.

This large-scale conversion of part-time to full-time (non-tenure-track) positions transformed the English department (of which the writing program represents about half). With seventeen additional full-time lecturers, the department became slightly more than half non-tenure-track faculty. The department made well-intentioned but only partly effectual efforts to incorporate non-tenure-track faculty into a culture created by tenure-track faculty. So there was a good bit of tension in the department, tension created by the ambiguity of expectations for promotion, scope of teaching responsibilities, and the requirements of a core curriculum. Our newer colleagues were conscious that they would now be evaluated on how well they fit in and contributed to the program (which is a motive that emphasizes sameness and consensus) and that they would be evaluated on how well they distinguished themselves as creative and excellent teachers (a motive that emphasizes diversity and even dissensus). Our department's literature offerings never had a centralized curriculum, and now many more full-time faculty were teaching both literature and writing. The contrast between the diversity of texts and assignments in introductory literature courses and the emphasis on common assignments in composition courses also created a strain. All of this put pressure on the writing program to change even as it also put pressure on the program to provide effective mentoring to help people feel part of the group.

This transition began as our movement toward DCM was beginning. In one sense, our journey to dynamic criteria mapping began decades ago, when Susanmarie first started training as a holistic reader of placement exams at the University of Michigan's English Composition Board. Her first day of training was not an auspicious beginning: what sticks out most in her memory is the private conference she had with an experienced rater about all the reasons why the test she had rated a 4 (out of 6 possible points)

couldn't possibly merit that score. "Don't you see that the organization isn't present?" the senior colleague asked. Susanmarie dutifully changed her score, but the experience stuck with her. Yes, there were elements of organization not present in that test, but there were other elements of the test that Susanmarie recognized as positive or likable. The disjunction between her own values and those of the holistic scoring guide led her, over time, to participate in assessment reforms that would bring teacher values more centrally into assessment processes. Her experiences at the University of Michigan's English Composition Board (ECB), then dominated by Quaker teachers, led her into the scholarship and practice of communal writing assessment. The Quaker commitment—to seeking clarity, to holding onto hard issues allowing many viewpoints to emerge and possibly reconcile, to valuing the hard process, to creating statements that articulated community values—indirectly affected her movement into large-scale assessment work. The ECB moved from impromptu scoring to portfolio assessment, trying experiments with different scoring guides, feedback mechanisms, and connections to K-12 education. Through this experience, and later at IUPUI, Susanmarie has learned to balance collaboration and control in writing program structures. Not all values are good, and not all teacher values can happily co-exist, but it's important to understand the ways competing or conflicting values play out in any particular program. While our writing program has a history of strong central control, we also have a history of strong faculty collaboration in shaping that central control.

A composition course assessment project led us to seek DCM as a way of exploring our assessment findings in more detail. Our program uses portfolios to evaluate student work in our writing courses, including our first-semester course. A two-day reading of a random sample of student portfolios from our first-semester course brought together twenty-five readers (some administrators, some experienced full or part time faculty, some new full- or part-time faculty). We took notes (using structured forms) and then ended each day with a collective discussion of what we saw in those portfolios that we valued, what we saw that troubled us, and what we didn't see that we missed. While we saw much to value in our students' work, one thing was clear to almost all of us (regardless of rank or teaching experience): we were not a faculty with a unified approach to reading and research. Although our curriculum makes a clear divide between English W131 and English W132, reserving research instruction for English W132, there were several sections of English W131 in which students conducted individual research (usually, but not always, on the internet) for informative or persuasive papers, and in which instructors and students viewed source citation simply in terms of evidence for a point. We read many writers' statements that said something like, "I went to the library/searched on

Google and found something that agreed with what I thought, so I quoted it.” Whether or not the students’ presentation of their research accurately reflected what had been taught, it was clear that web-based research was valued in some portfolios in ways that surprised many readers. At the same time, we found many portfolios that barely, if at all, attended to the non-fiction book which all sections were (supposedly) using as a way to frame reading, writing, and inquiry for the semester. We were unsettled by this slide into an approach to working with sources which most in the room claimed not to value.

So what to do? Rather than circulate yet another curriculum guide, or a memo reminding people that writing best proceeds through deliberation and inquiry rather than a search for support for a pre-conceived stance, we wanted to find a way to bring a debate about assigned course readings into the open. This is tricky business—there are a number of programmatic factors that sometimes appear to be in conflict:

- We have a common curriculum, but, we want individual teachers to work to their strengths within a common framework
- We have faculty whose public discussion of the use of reading and sources seemed very different from their actual teaching practices
- We have faculty who quietly rejected the curriculum guide’s central text and used something else
- We have faculty who work in specialized programs involving linked courses who used different readings

We wanted to celebrate diversity, while maintaining some course coherence, while acknowledging that diversity doesn’t necessarily equal quality.

Clearly, what was driving our faculty to such divergent practices were differing value systems, and we needed an approach that would help us look at the divergent values. Centralized documents that failed to address differences in values were never going to take hold. So we continued the assessment process in our end-of-semester portfolio readings, asking faculty to read sample portfolios together and to talk about what they liked, and what they didn’t like, in those portfolios from the end of the course.

We have held portfolio readings at the end of each semester for decades now, not for determining course grades but for providing a space in which standards for grading can be articulated. We generally assume faculty have graded portfolios before they attend the meetings, and then at the meetings we read sample or representative portfolios each faculty member has brought to share with other faculty. Often, the sample portfolios will represent high, average, or failing work and we will review these portfolios

together with some common purpose or goal in mind. In addition, faculty are encouraged to bring portfolios for which they have concerns (usually because a particular portfolio was hard to grade, such as when a faculty member feels his or her judgment may be clouded by a positive or negative relationship with the student). We began using these meetings to implement DCM as a form of assessment, professional development, and program assessment.

Our DCM process took the following shape (a shape that emerged in the doing; our results didn't match our initial hopes for having a map generated within a few meetings, thus our mapping process was extended):

Stage 1: Discussion of sample portfolios

Stage 2: Analysis and grouping of terms that emerged from discussion of samples

Stage 3: Production of documents using the analysis in stage 2 to represent the raw material from stage 1

Stage 4: Creation of a dynamic rubric

Stage 5: Teaching and grading dynamically

STAGE 1: DISCUSSION OF SAMPLE PORTFOLIOS

English W131, our first-semester writing course, is organized around the writing of four papers, leading to the production of two portfolios. As students work on each portfolio, they are invited to choose the papers they want to represent their writing, papers which themselves reflect different kinds of writing. They might, for example, write a narrative of their life experience after having read an instructor-selected non-fiction text. Or, they might write a response to a section of the non-fiction text, defending their position with reference to the non-fiction text and their life experience. One aim of English W131 is to provide practice in asserting and defending assertions with instructor-supplied resources or their life experience. Another aim is for students to learn to reflect on their writing and their writing process, and to write about both in an essay that self-assesses the growth in both. The value of the approach, we feel, is that students have an element of choice in what is evaluated by their instructor, and they have a part in that evaluation through self-assessment.

In order to understand what was happening in the course, we spent the 2003-04 year talking about sample portfolios, asking our instructors in workshops what they found pleasing or troubling in portfolios. Scott worked hard to generate lists of observations and at later workshops we had faculty work in groups to categorize the observations and create maps. Our

plan was to listen to what was said and record what we heard on large post-it notes we had brought to the reading. By using this method, we hoped to hear from faculty what they valued in the student writing and to use this information to continue the construction of a map for our program.

We took notes as we listened to faculty talk to one another about what they saw in the portfolios. When the portfolio reading ended, we had two sets of notes that we could reconcile. This reconciliation would be our initial record of what faculty in our program valued or did not value when they read student writing, leading to a list of positive and negative responses to the portfolios. Our notes reflect our faculty’s interest in what many might term rather conventional first-year writing: there is clearly an emphasis on exposition, thesis statements, support for claims, and traditional organization. This is not surprising given our course goals at the time, which emphasized posing good questions about texts, topics, purposes, and audience; forming and supporting a thesis; integrating others’ ideas and citing correctly; using a variety of prose styles (from thesis-based writing to literary non-fiction); developing planning, drafting, and revising processes; working productively in groups; and editing effectively. A full list of descriptors appears in Appendix A: “Initial Faculty-Identified Attributes in Sample Portfolios,” but Table 1 displays some of the comments we noted:

Table 1: Some faculty descriptors of sample portfolios

<i>Positives</i>	<i>Negatives</i>
1 Semblance of organization	1 Lack of purpose in how points are presented
2 Knowledgeable of goals; more than rote review of course goals; covers goals	2 Split focus—shifts around—no plan
3 Audience awareness	3 Wanders in tangents
4 Good use of signal phrasing	4 Lack of transitions; transition nil
5 Good sense of style	5 Didn’t see synthesis
6 Good use of voice	6 Weak thesis
7 Good use of analysis	7 Usually a let down
8 Good use of specificity	8 I expected more
9 Risk taking by moving beyond own belief	9 Few supporting examples; undeveloped paragraphs; lack of support
10 Grapples with complexity	10 Redundant
11 Gave details	11 No details; broad sweeps
12 Thoughtful use of language	12 Lack of support; Needs exhibits?
13 Discussion of process is good; sense of comfort with process; shows understanding of process	13 Lack of collaboration with others

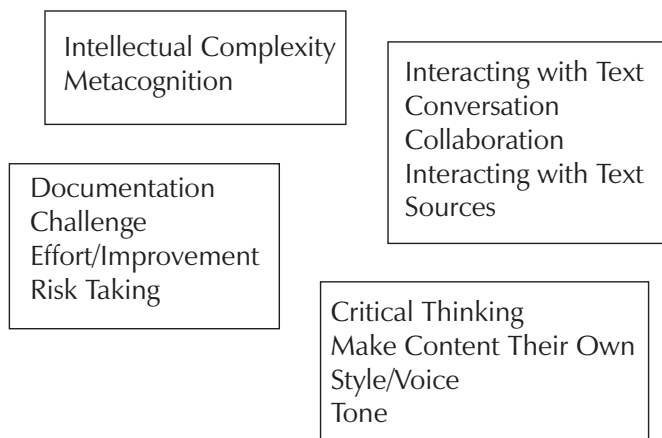
- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| 14 | Prove it to me—tell me something new | 14 | Use language like “I feel” too much |
| 15 | Good symmetry | 15 | Poor introductions |
| 16 | Better and better at open form | 16 | Not stretching, no risk taking |

STAGE 2: ANALYSIS AND GROUPING OF TERMS THAT EMERGED FROM DISCUSSION OF SAMPLES

With our reconciled list of positive and negative responses, we were now ready for the next step. At our next workshop (spring 2004), we redistributed the portfolios that had been used at the December end-of-semester workshop and presented the faculty with lists of positive and negative responses they had generated at the December workshop. We then asked faculty groups to organize the responses into general categories with headings. Our goal was to come up with groupings of terms our faculty identified as important when evaluating student work, and to use the workshop to merge different groups' work into one map or table.

As the workshop progressed, it became apparent that we were not going to be able to produce a map from our efforts that evening. We anticipated that the process of moving from group to group would create an expanded set of categories that could be placed in a map, but as the faculty worked, they perceived their task to be to combine categories and headings. As the evening concluded, we had three groups of faculty who produced three pictures of what they thought our faculty valued. The pictures were less maps and more illustrations, and the variety was interesting, but difficult to interpret—none of us seemed to have the same idea about what it meant to graphically represent values. In addition, it was clear that most of the faculty were interested in synthesizing values to create the fewest number of categories, leading by the end of the evening to elided terms and markedly different results. As we reviewed what happened, we decided to work with the groupings and headings the faculty had come up with early at the meeting to see if we could work with them to create a map. What resulted can be seen in the document, “Headings for a Dynamic Criteria Map Derived from Discussions at the Spring 2004 English W131 Workshop” (Appendix B). A few examples appear in Figure 1.

As these examples show, we looked for major themes and tried to organize particular observations into groups to give some order to faculty impressions. We tried to honor the collective discussion, using key phrases from the ill-fated maps to guide some of our choices. “Risk taking” and “Challenge” had been major headers on two maps, for example, so we grouped those together. The inclusion of documentation with risk taking may strike some readers as odd, but it flowed from our rambling conversations about the place of technical documentation as an extension of risky,

Fig 1. Headings Map

text-based inquiry. Over time, our arrangement of terms would evolve, but for this stage of our DCM work, we began the process of grouping terms.

We also highlighted new terms that had emerged in the discussions, while honoring traditional terms in our program. “Intellectual Complexity,” a quality of writing that faculty seemed to value across the board, had never really been named in a program document before. Having a name for a quality which distinguishes truly outstanding writing felt exciting. “Synthesis” or “Engagement,” on the other hand, had been previously articulated values in our discussion—those terms, long valued by our faculty, long prominent in our curriculum, continued to hold an important place in our document.

STAGE 3: REPRESENTING THE DATA IN USEFUL FORMS

It turned out that we had some interesting categories to work with. Having created these large categories, we hoped then to organize a map. But the mapping exercise was ultimately not feasible—we’re not particularly graphic thinkers, it seemed—but we had generated categorized lists of descriptors associated with strong and weak portfolios, a set of headings that we could group, and finally sets of grouped headings. Our next step was to see how the faculty would work with the headings that had been recombined with the descriptors. This recombination led to a document with the headings and a set of descriptors underneath, as shown in “Faculty-Identified Attributes Organized According to the Major Headings” (Appendix C). For example, taking account of the context surrounding the terms “Complexity” and “Intellectual Complexity,” we created the following cluster representing related qualities:

Intellectual Complexity
Thoughtful

Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work
 Intelligent ideas
 Originality

At the end-of-semester portfolio reading that spring, we decided to use this new document to have faculty consider which of the descriptions would help them to decide whether a portfolio was of high, medium, or low quality because we were curious about how the faculty would use the descriptions contained within the document to make evaluation decisions. In other words, we wondered how these attributes were linked to the grading scales faculty used.

For the spring portfolio reading, we asked faculty to bring portfolios from their sections that represented high-, medium-, and low-quality work and to share them with their colleagues. At the reading we planned to have faculty pick up a set of three portfolios, read them, and with a copy of the new “Faculty-Identified Attributes” document, decide whether a portfolio they read was of high, medium, or low quality and mark the document with one of three colored markers to indicate which of the descriptors factored in their decisions. To facilitate this process, we distributed three differently-colored highlighters to each faculty member.

STAGE 4: CREATION OF A DYNAMIC RUBRIC

When the meeting was over, we collected the highlighted copies of “Faculty-Identified Attributes” and tallied the results. As we did, we looked for patterns that would suggest which headings and descriptors were favored by faculty when responding. It turned out that some descriptions were clearly used more often to decide whether a portfolio was of high quality, of medium quality, or of low quality (see “Descriptors Identified by Faculty As Relevant to an Assessment of Sample Portfolios at the Spring 2004 End-of-Semester Portfolio Reading,” Appendix D). Table 2 shows some examples:

Table 2: Excerpt from Faculty Descriptors of Above Passing, Passing, and Below Passing

High (Above Passing)	Medium (Passing)	Low (Below Passing)	Structure—
5	1	1	I like when students have a nice idea structure
4	4	0	The writer did think about structure in his narrative
2	2	0	Narrative has good form
3	2	1	Helping students develop structure in their essays is important

0	5	1	Better transitions are needed
0	3	1	Emphasis on structure, prevents critical thinking
1	2	1	I don't mind if the structure comes across as boring
0	2	4	Paper isn't obviously a synthesis
0	1	7	No transitions appear between the major parts of the narrative
0	1	9	Wanders in tangents
0	1	7	Redundant

Displaying summaries of faculty conversation in this form highlights not just the terms faculty used to describe structure in our sample portfolios, but shows the relative values associated with particular terms. One descriptor, “No transitions appear between the major parts of the essay,” is clearly a descriptor associated with not-so-good work. Of faculty who marked this descriptor, all indicated that it was used to decide that a portfolio represented low quality. Other descriptors were uniformly and unsurprisingly associated with strong work. Of the faculty who marked “strong thesis” in our category for tone, all indicated it reflected writing of high quality. Under “Risk taking,” one descriptor read, “The writer has produced safe essays.” The majority of faculty highlighting this description did so thinking that writing represented by this description reflected medium quality. With information like this we hoped to identify what language in particular faculty would use to make an evaluation decision. Finding such language might help us to sort out what we might use to construct a map.

Just as Harrington and Weeden brought in the language of the instructors from their program, at UNR we found that incorporating the language that instructors used to describe their values for student writing helped to create a sense of buy-in and ownership by all members of our writing program. Part of our administrative mandate included the assessment of critical thinking. By using the terms and descriptions generated in our focus groups, we were able to develop critical thinking features that were easily recognizable to our instructors. For our assessment, this meant that the descriptors of each feature might have overlaps to incorporate identifiable language. *Detweiler and McBride*

However, as we tallied the results, we realized that some interpretive work was going to be needed, for sometimes faculty were divided about how they marked a descriptor. For example, under the heading “Effort/improvement,” faculty were divided over the descriptor “Tries to make subject-matter changes between drafts.” Of those who marked this descriptor, half said that it represents work of medium quality while the other half said it represents work of high quality. In marking the descriptors in this way the faculty

appeared to be saying is that at least, students are attempting to make subject-matter changes between drafts in passing portfolios, but the portfolios with the best writing showed students actually making these changes.

There were other examples in which the majority chose one level of quality, say medium, while another group chose one a level up or down. In these cases we decided that faculty had identified descriptors that were medium-high and medium-low in quality. There were a few curious cases where a descriptor that would seem to be associated with one level of quality was highlighted for another. An example is the statement, “Grapples with complexity,” under the heading “Critical thinking.” The vast majority of those checking this descriptor did so thinking that the writing represented high quality. A few indicated they had this descriptor in mind when deciding that the portfolio was of low quality. Apparently, this statement about what makes a piece of writing of higher quality was used to point to what was missing in a portfolio of low quality.

Although the point of the analysis was to identify descriptors under headings that could be used in a dynamic criteria map, the process revealed faculty preference for certain language. As we thought about the results, we remembered faculty resistance to creating and even using a map. Our colleagues were perfectly happy to come to meetings, talk about samples, and negotiate differences, but they weren’t really waiting for the map we kept advertising as a future product. “When will the new rubric be done?” they asked. “We don’t want a rubric,” we kept saying, “This is a new way.” But as we looked at our data, we realized that perhaps a rubric, a *new kind* of rubric, would be the document to move us along the way. Perhaps not all rubrics need be subject to the flaws in traditional ones.

With this in mind, Scott took the results from the portfolio reading and created a draft of what he called a dynamic rubric (see “Reorganization of Descriptors into Possible Rubric Based on Responses,” Appendix E). That document opens with a description of very high quality work:

Very High Quality

Intellectual complexity is demonstrated by presenting interesting ideas in an original way. It is obvious that the writer understands that writing involves difficult, even frustrating, work. The writer shows that he or she can grapple with complexity.

The writer demonstrates good understanding of his or her own writing process through thoughtful evaluation of peer response, thoughtful evaluation and critique of his or her process in writer’s statements and the retrospective, and appropriate connections to the course goals in the

retrospective. There is good analysis in the retrospective and the writer identifies areas of improvement in the writing of the portfolio.

The next meeting of the faculty occurred at the fall 2004 workshop. At this workshop we asked the faculty to look at the draft of this new rubric and talk about its strengths and weaknesses. The dynamic rubric generated some good discussion at the workshop. One of the things faculty pointed out was the dynamic rubric provided more guidance for them because it was rich with language at the upper and lower levels. However, they also pointed out that fewer descriptors appeared at the passing level, and they felt that this was a drawback since passing quality is what we want students to achieve. Since the course goals would also be focusing on passing work, it was felt that this lack of descriptors was a limitation that needed to be addressed.

In *Contingencies of Value*, Barbara Smith (1988) argues that values are not “fixed” or “objective” qualities, but they are “an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables” (30). Likewise, Scott and Susanmarie’s DCM work with their colleagues, which produced the dynamic rubric’s richly synthesized and interwoven criteria descriptions, illustrates how assessment values are contingent upon their rhetorical interrelationships and contexts. *Stalions*

STAGE 5: TEACHING AND GRADING DYNAMICALLY

Another thing the faculty wondered was how students would respond to the language of the dynamic rubric if it were passed out to them. They felt that the statements in the document read very much like statements teachers would use when talking about student work, but they doubted whether students would be able to relate to or understand this language (which in itself raises good questions about the language gaps between teacher and student). Thus, they questioned whether two documents would be created, one for instructors and one for students. When we asked them about language for a new set of course goals, the faculty agreed that as a program we should focus on the values of developing or using intellectual complexity, engaging with outside reading, using meta-analysis as a reinforcement of what a student learns about his or her own writing process, and paying attention to stylistic concerns within a text. As the meeting finished, we asked for volunteers for two committees, one to work on a new set of course goals, and one to continue to work on the new dynamic rubric.

Over the next several months, Scott worked with both sets of volunteers to develop the new goals and a refinement of the rubric (see

Appendix E). In December, the group working on the dynamic rubric met and refined the document. As Susanmarie monitored this process, however, she became concerned that if the dynamic rubric could develop into a full-blown rubric, the old limitations of using a rubric would reassert themselves. She recommended we return to the spirit of dynamic criteria mapping and make the dynamic rubric more open. To achieve this end, she suggested that the faculty working on the dynamic rubric divide it into three headings—passing, above passing, and below passing. She also suggested that rather than call it a “rubric,” we should call it a grading guide or “UnRubric,” highlighting the emphasis in dynamic criteria mapping that documents used to assess act as guides rather than administrative expectations.

A full version of this document appears in Appendix F, and it is designed to inform teacher work without dominating it. Its introduction notes:

The following descriptions show what we value in student writing in the IUPUI writing program and are designed to be a guide to grading decisions in English W131. They emerge from our discussions over the past year about what we find true about portfolios that are “Passing” (baseline to pass the course), “Better than Passing” (A or B work), and “Below Passing” (C–, D, or F work).

The passing descriptions are more detailed because this is the level student work must reach to pass the course. At the “Better than Passing” and “Below Passing” levels, the assumption is that one begins with the passing descriptions and then considers the merits of a portfolio given the additional information of the other two lists.

So a passing description of one factor we value—moving beyond familiar thinking—looks like this:

- The writer attempts to move beyond familiar thinking by actively engaging with outside ideas from texts, classmates, and the instructor
- The writer develops reasonable questions, responses, and assertions in the process of challenging his or her own thinking or the thinking of others
- The writer attempts original ideas in his or her papers while keeping readers’ needs in mind

Better-than-passing work in this area might look like this:

- The writer shows that intellectual complexity is an important priority
- The writer obviously takes risks
- The writer expresses truly creative ideas and insights
- The writer creatively adapts to the assignments

While in below-passing work:

- The writing in the portfolio shows that no risk taking is occurring
- Essays depend too much on binary thinking
- The writer fails to grapple with the complexities of issues

Freed from the constraint of needing a description that varies only in the adjective applied to it (excellent, good, fair or weak complexity, for example), we are able to tease out different actions a writer might take. The difference between stellar student work and barely passing student work is often differences in kind rather than degree. Excellent portfolios might manifest different qualities, tackling broader subjects or displaying creativity in ways that barely passing portfolios don't. Thinking about both how to describe the features of work that meets course objectives at a passing level, and how to describe truly outstanding work opened up our dialogue. This enhances teaching, not to mention making grading more honest.

The writing coordinating committee for our department also became involved in this process, and they agreed with our assessment. In March, the group working on the dynamic rubric produced a new version following Susanmarie's suggestion. As Scott worked with the faculty committee on the new UnRubric, he also kept the committee working on the course goals appraised of the wording in the UnRubric. After working a relatively short time, the two committees had two documents to present to the writing coordinating committee for its consideration. The committee met, and when the two documents were presented, they approved both (with some refinement of the language of the course goals). Both documents were adopted for the 2005-2006 school year (see Appendix F, "The UnRubric: The English W131 Grading Guide" and Appendix G, "English W131 Course Goals").

Since then, we have continued to refine our course goals, although we continue to use the UnRubric that was originally developed. Scott has surveyed the faculty both formally and informally, and they report to him that they appreciate the room the UnRubric gives them in making grading decisions, although part-time faculty new to our program are sometimes initially confused by it, having had more experience with traditional rubrics. After it is explained to them and they use it, they report that they, too, appreciate the flexibility it provides them.

Generally, DCM has encouraged more plain speaking and simplicity in our program documents and conversations. We reduced the nine course goals we adopted in 2005 to a set of six goals that we use presently. Inspired by Elbow (2005), we sought to present "practical and writerly outcomes" (179) that represent our priorities for the course, teasing out the goal from

particular elements of student performance. The first goal, for example, tells students:

When you successfully complete this course, you should

Have something to say

This means you will

Shape essays or projects that support a strong thesis, or convey a clear theme

Produce texts that match your own idea of what you wanted to say

Learn more about what you write about as you write

Our DCM process continues, as we move through another revision of our UnRubric and course goals to bring the plain language of the goals even more in line with the assessment materials faculty use. In addition, we have expanded the options faculty have in terms of the assignments they use and the portfolios that are produced. Some faculty, for example, are experimenting with assigning shorter papers at the beginning of the course, leading students to longer papers by course's end. These changes have, in turn, produced changes in some of the final portfolios that emerge from some sections, making our end-of-semester portfolio readings more dynamic themselves (the end-of-semester readings have become an opportunity for professional development rather than simply an occasion to assert a programmatic discipline).

LIVING WITH DCM

The extended conversations about DCM have led us to investigate the metaphors we use when we talk together. Two that stand out are *interaction* (or *engagement* or *conversation*) and *degree of difficulty*. (Lots of references to diving competitions occurred during our meetings!) These terms have given faculty a way to talk about what we want reading and writing to accomplish in our courses. Our prior debates about curriculum had often come down to debates over logistics (should we have a midterm portfolio?) or book choices (reader vs. course pack vs. book?). With these metaphors in front of us, we could look at the intellectual work of reading and think together about what we want students to learn. Thus, the DCM workshops pushed all faculty to engage with issues of writing, rather than issues of course design that were framed more in terms of discipline than content. Previously, our conversations about central curricular issues tended to end with conversations about how to make sure that everyone adopted a particular practice, assignment, or approach. The DCM focus on metaphor and the freedom to articulate differences led us to explore teaching and student writing as an intellectual and affective practice.

WHAT THESE METAPHORS SAY

Interaction/engagement/conversation

This cluster of metaphors involves a social context, imagining both an involved writer and involved others. The notion of interacting with texts highlights the importance of writers' "talking back" to texts, approaching the text with a strong agenda, willing to be affected by the reading as well. Faculty who valued this engagement frequently commented that "writing is hard work," or commended a student writer for being unafraid to take on a challenge. Writers who interact with what they read are clearly willing to tussle with a question (of fact or interpretation) and are willing to modify their thinking in light of the reading they do. The notion of conversation, as well, stresses the give-and-take surrounding important issues. Issues worth writing about are those people are talking about, whether they are issues on a grand scale (the values embedded in a liberal education) or on a local one (the values embedded in the writer's own choice to begin college).

Ironically, the discussion of this issue also opened our own meetings up to greater intellectual engagement. The process of DCM illustrated that program leadership meant what we said: we wanted to change the way a centralized curriculum worked. We invited faculty to discuss their competing values, and in the course of addressing those conflicts, we all became more engaged in conversation.

One of the benefits of engaging in a DCM-like process is the increased interaction and involvement of faculty. Discussions about what instructors value in student writing open up discussions about teaching, writing, managing paper loads, assignment design, and many other topics that bring faculty together in new ways. *Detweiler and McBride*

Degree of difficulty

The other dominant metaphor is related to the notion of engagement: "degree of difficulty" came to stand for what kinds of risks students were willing to take on their own initiative. The notion of degree of difficulty honors the choices that some writers make to pursue more challenging subjects and writing tasks. This term, often used by some faculty alongside the term "intellectual complexity," is harder to get at, since it involved for some faculty a conscious risk (which is really a property of the *writer*), for others a framing of a question or purpose (which is really a property of the *essay*). So to what extent is the notion of complexity or degree of difficulty attempting to grade a writer, rather than writing? And to what extent is either move appropriate? That's the question we're grappling with now. It's

an interesting exercise, trying to describe what are the qualities of either an approach to writing, or a text, that are harder or more complicated. It is easy enough to say that we'll know it when we see it—but how do we teach it? How do we describe it for students who may not yet know enough to “know it then they see it”?

This metaphor, although it's a sticky one, has been an exciting one, since it has enabled us to start talking about how to distinguish the excellent from the pedestrian. And that's important.

Values of metaphor-based inquiry

Our experiences reveal two principles:

- Curricular disputes are disputes over values, and attempts to solve the dispute without attending to underlying values will be futile
- The metaphors we use to describe what we value can help us decide what we want to teach

In our case, we need to describe writing assignments in ways that give students and faculty freedom to work from their strengths within a common framework. As we articulate our values, we are framing a more flexible—yet hopefully more coherent—curriculum, one rooted in common values rather than in common assignments and texts. Because what we value about reading is both a student's ability to interact with texts and her ability to pursue purposeful inquiry, we need to craft a curriculum that has four key qualities.

First, we must emphasize reading and writing as a conversation, or a series of conversations, about issues. This will connect peer response workshops, in-class activities, private reading, private writing, and public writing. Second, we need to remember that emphasizing conversations means emphasizing good listening—which for reading, is the ability to summarize. But that summarizing is not an end in itself—it's a beginning, a first stage before responding. Too many of our old assignments taught summary as an isolated skill—here we see that we need to connect summary/listening and conversation more clearly. Third, we must keep in mind that conversations have many styles: sometimes people need to feed back to each other what's just been said (summary, restatement of facts); other times, people need to describe what someone else said (looking at the rhetorical moves); at still other times, people need to interpret what someone else has said (looking at the significance of the text). Reading instruction, as Linda and Heidi discuss, needs to cover all these bases. Fourth, we need to find a baseline level of challenge that is appropriate for any student in the course, with opportunities for some students to work with a more difficult

piece. To some extent, the risks associated with higher degrees of difficulty need to be recognized in assessment—so our new grading document (which won't be a rubric, but that's another topic for another day) needs to discuss how some qualities of a polished portfolio might need to be traded off against others. Some degree of failure at a harder task might be better than an easy or trite success.

CONCLUSION

In the end, dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) provided us an opportunity to restructure conversations about student learning outcomes and course goals so that all faculty participated in shaping program language. This has had a range of effects, some clearly good, others more mixed. Our conversations have not healed all the fissures within our program. Many tensions still remain, such as differences between advocates of writing with strong and early thesis statements and advocates of more flexible structures or genres such as collages; and differences between those who are deeply troubled by the presence or absence of grammar instruction or errors.

This touches a chord that we found in our experience at MMCC: people have a real hunger for a conversation about real learning and teaching. The tension Susan/marie and Scott talk about is a valuable and difficult part of the conversation. It is hard to get real tension and real disagreement on the table and work through it. To me, that is one of the most impressive things about their project.

Alford

To some extent, DCM was an attractive way to manage some faculty discontent with the curriculum. As faculty grumbled a bit about assignments, the curriculum, and the course rhetoric, DCM provided a productive outlet. It provided a way to change. Ironically, now that faculty have choice, a kind of conservatism prevails, as when faculty decided they like the chosen rhetoric when it is compared with others—so maybe we were doing things right as program coordinators choosing materials for the course. Yet faculty are becoming more open about talking about how they use the common curriculum, and we are beginning to hear about some interesting variations in what we do. For example, some are exploring changes in how they handle writing assignments, trying to begin the semester with smaller assignments and working to lengthier final projects in final portfolios. Others are trying new genres, such as profiles or proposals. Through all this change, many are expressing excitement about being able to take a more active part in decisions about the course, and frequently faculty come to course meetings and workshops eager to listen and ready to participate.

As faculty try new approaches in the course, we are working to encourage them to report on these innovations so that we all gain from what they learn. We think this emphasis on inquiry into teaching is one of the more important effects of our work on dynamic criteria mapping for our first-year program. We believe their interest in their work will grow and will help us to foster the sort of discussions that we value as a program. In addition, we believe that faculty will take a greater interest how their work affects student learning. For example, one of our part-time faculty members has expressed an interest in finding out whether the assignments he teaches and the skills they represent are used in other courses. He hopes to undertake a survey of faculty in other departments to gauge how what he teaches in our first-year course is valued elsewhere. In other words, he has begun to ask whether what he values in his own writing instruction is used and reinforced in instruction in other classes the students might take. This sort of interest in what matters will not only help his own teaching, but will help the ongoing development of our first-year course.

We end this chapter where we began: the question of rubrics. Is the UnRubric a rubric? It may be construed a rubric if what faculty mean when they say *rubric* is “some kind of official program document that explains how we grade.” It certainly isn’t a rubric in terms of its approach to describing different levels of performance. The UnRubric’s attention to qualitative distinctions between levels of performance means that faculty (and students, in the right settings) have a framework that encourages variety in performance within common values. It is that commitment to variation within common values that strikes us as the fundamental benefit of DCM, and in fact, as its fundamental tenet. We would assert that in practice, a large multi-section course benefits from some kind of grading guideline. An oversimplified rubric won’t promote coherence, but some kind of public document must represent the program or course’s shared values. We began our DCM process assuming that some kind of visual graphic—shapes and words, as in the City University map in *What We Really Value* (Broad 2003)—would be our public representation. But graphics didn’t lead to any clarity about our shared values, and thus we arrived at the UnRubric. Its words bring us together.

APPENDIX A

Initial Faculty-Identified Attributes in Sample Portfolios That Reflect What They Like or Do Not Like in the Writing of the Portfolios⁸

Positives	Negatives
1 Semblance of organization	1 Lack of purpose in how points are presented
2 Knowledgeable of goals; more than rote review of course goals; covers goals	2 Split focus—shifts around—no plan
3 Audience awareness	3 Wanders in tangents
4 Good use of signal phrasing	4 Lack of transitions; transition nil
5 Good sense of style	5 Didn't see synthesis
6 Good use of voice	6 Weak thesis
7 Good use of analysis	7 Usually a let down
8 Good use of specificity	8 I expected more
9 Risk taking by moving beyond own belief	9 Few supporting examples; undeveloped paragraphs; lack of support
10 Grapples with complexity	10 Redundant
11 Gave details	11 No details; broad sweeps
12 Thoughtful use of language	12 Lack of support; Needs exhibits?
13 Discussion of process is good; sense of comfort with process; shows understanding of process	13 Lack of collaboration with others
14 Prove it to me—tell me something new	14 Use language like "I feel" too much
15 Good symmetry	15 Poor introductions
16 Better and better at open form	16 Not stretching, no risk taking
17 Engagement in subject; creative identification with the reading	17 Few citations
18 Original thinking; depth of thinking; thinking below the surface	18 Less revision
19 Development of writing	19 Too much binary thinking
20 No obstacles while reading	20 Amount of time spent on essay equals quality (This is a student perception)
21 Examples and analysis	21 Less and less reader friendly
22 Understanding of academic conventions	22 No audience awareness

8. Some descriptors appear under more than one heading, reflecting divergence in faculty views as priorities gradually emerged from the complex conversation.

23	Fun with language; making language “their” own	23	No understanding of not stretching
24	Creative	24	More audience development needed in the writer’s statement
25	Narrow angle of vision; focus	25	Student gets sources off the internet which lets them off the hook of having to cite
26	Personal investment	26	Problems with internet sources leads to plagiarism
27	Thought	27	Too much listing
28	Specific detail	28	Sporadic use of wild/weird goals
29	Use of intertextuality	29	Shift of focus
30	Nice introductions—engaged in the subject	30	Lack of focus causes the paper to seem like 2 papers
31	Stylistic devices like repetition and metaphors	31	Lack of unity in paragraphs
32	Nice sharp thesis that previews the complexity of the discussion	32	Problem with synthesis—viewpoints presented but not used to present author’s position. “It is difficult to see student’s opinion develop as a result of his/her analysis.”
33	Evidence of revision	33	Intrusive style: “I feel,” “you,” etc.
34	Meeting the assignment	34	Grammar errors
35	Clarity and conciseness	35	Inaccurate MLA style
36	Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work	36	Points purposeless and unrelated to thesis
37	Honest	37	High school style
38	Sentence variety	38	Vague examples
39	Intelligent ideas	39	Telling the reader what the author is going to do
40	Symmetry and balance in thought and form	40	Insufficient proofreading
41	Insightful point of view; originality	41	Glowing generalities
42	Ethical, appropriate, accurate use of sources	42	Wordiness
43	Good discussion of peer response in Portfolio Writer’s Statement	43	Poor integration of sources; sources poorly introduced; “stated” overused
44	Thoughtful evaluation of peer response	44	Intro that shows no understanding of conventions
45	Stays on track	45	Lack of a sense of how to handle the scope of the assignment (Critical Analysis Writer’s Statement)
46	Original format	46	Lack of sentence variety
47	Self-aware; student able to be critical of own writing	47	Citation errors

- 48 Blah thesis does not fit the paper
- 49 Ineffective two-part thesis
- 49 Contradictory statements
- 50 Broad, difficult subject (perhaps not appropriate for this essay); reasons for some points aren't explored.
- 51 "Telling" rather than "showing" strategy to support thesis
- 52 Interesting ideas hinted at but not well-analyzed

APPENDIX B***Headings for a Dynamic Criteria Map Derived from Discussions at the Spring 2004 English W131 Workshop***

Intellectual Complexity
Metacognition

Critical Thinking
Make Content Their Own
Style/Voice
Tone

Use of Language
Language/Text
Develop Topic
Reading, Writing, Thinking Connections
Reading Comprehension
Summary
Analysis

Interacting with Text
Conversation
Collaboration
Interacting with Text
Sources

Documentation
Challenge
Effort/Improvement
Risk Taking

Questioning
Engagement with Topic
Engaging Texts
See Context
Rhetorical Choices
Arrangement
Structure
Organization
Examples Explain Concepts

Paraphrase
Reader

Student as Writer

APPENDIX C

Faculty-Identified Attributes Organized According to the Major Headings Identified at the Spring 2004 Workshop

The categories in italics were generated at the Spring Workshop, held February 2004 (Appendix B). The descriptors under the categories were generated at the Fall Portfolio Reading, December 2003.

Intellectual Complexity

Thoughtful
Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work
Intelligent ideas
Originality
Original format
Complexity of ideas and thought should be a first priority
Attempts at originality
Superficial revision, based on literal reading of what instructor asks
Students who follow *Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing* are doomed to a boring, successful essay

Metacognition

Writer identifies areas of improvement in the retrospective
Recognizes transitions as a tool for cohesion
Connections with goals made in retrospective
Discussion of process is good
Shows understanding of the process
Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work
Good discussion of peer response in the Portfolio Writer's Statement
Thoughtful evaluation of peer response
Student able to be critical of own writing
Concepts are explained in the retrospective, but no details are provided to support what the concepts mean
No retrospective analysis

Critical Thinking

Grapples with complexity
Originality/depth
Intelligent ideas
Class is about thinking and ideas
Too much binary thinking

Make Content Their Own

Personal investment
The papers merely meet the criteria as the student understands them

Questioning

Are subject-matter questions addressed?

Challenge

Students rise to challenge that is set
I wish we had more challenging assignments
Standards we have for students can be too high

Effort/Improvement

Following directions
Gets into analysis
Tries to make subject matter changes between drafts
Student tries hard to do what assignment asks
The more challenging essays were chosen for the portfolio
Making progress on papers while revising
We need to prize what students do in their work
Development of writing
Evidence of revision
Meeting the assignment expectations
Good drafts, full of information
Meeting assignment should be second to complexity of ideas
Attempts at creativity
Misses focus of assignment
A new draft is needed
Superficial revision, based on literal reading of what instructor asks
It is obvious little time is put into revising papers, which results in products that are less polished
Less revision

Risk Taking

Tries to make subject-matter changes between drafts
Risk taking by moving beyond own belief
No new idea emerges from the synthesis
There is weakness in being a slave to text models
The writer has produced safe essays
Writing safely leads to boring essays with a lack of development
No stretching, no risking
Lack of understanding the need to stretch

Engagement with Topic

More ideas apparent and more examples lead to fascinating papers
Interesting stuff appears
Engagement with the subject

Style/Voice

Confident voice
 Good sense of style
 Good use of voice
 Focus
 Stylistic devices like repetition and metaphor
 Use of sentence variety
 Sincerity

Tone

Narrow angle of vision
 Strong thesis
 Enthusiasm
 Sincerity
 Confident voice

Use of Language

Good use of signal phrasing
 Thoughtful use of language
 Has fun with the language
 Good use of language
 Wonderful use of verbs
 Clarity
 Connecting with transitions
 No attributive tags appear, which is disturbing
 No transitions appear between the major parts of the essay
 Uses language like "I feel" too much
 Diction (including accuracy)
 Accuracy of grammar, language, spelling

Language/Text

An attempt at open-form prose
 Makes the language their own
 Clarity and conciseness evident
 Narrative thoughtful
 A clear thesis exists
 Relevant details
 Paper isn't obviously a synthesis
 The student slips into research paper mode
 Underdeveloped paragraphs
 Poor introductions

Develop Topic

Very specific ideas and details necessary
 Without details, the essay falls apart
 Weak thesis

Reading, Writing, Thinking Connections

Connections made
 Creative identification with the reading
 The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources

Reading Comprehension

Superficial revision, based on literal reading of what instructor asks
 Misses the point of the texts being used

Engaging Texts

Engages other texts
 Text should have connection to other sources
 I didn't see engagement happening

See Context

Use of intertextuality

Rhetorical Choices

Catchy title
 Recognizes transitions as a tool for cohesion
 Essay becomes stronger as we move through it
 Uses gaps in open-form prose
 The student did a good job of showing rather than telling
 Audience awareness
 Prove it to me
 Better and better open form
 Interesting story-telling techniques
 Documents claims in the retrospective, like a lawyer
 Is the essay a summary/strong response?
 I couldn't get the author's point
 The essay doesn't create tension like we'd expect
 Lack of purpose in how points are presented
 Split focus shifts around no plan
 Didn't see synthesis
 No audience awareness
 Audience development needed in writer's state

Arrangement

Nice introduction
 Nice sharp thesis that previews the complexity of the discussion
 Good division of paragraphs
 Hung together well
 Connection with transitions
 The paper is made up of bits and pieces from sources scattered all over
 The thesis appears at the end of the essay
 Lack of transitions

Structure

Helping students develop structure in their essays is important
 The writer did think about structure in his narrative
 I like when students have a nice idea structure
 I don't mind if the structure comes across as boring
 Helping students develop structure is important
 Narrative has good form
 Paper isn't obviously a synthesis
 No transitions appear between the major parts of the narrative
 Better transitions are needed
 Emphasis on structure, prevents critical thinking
 Wanders in tangents
 Redundant

Conversation

Good example of what is meant by the conversation metaphor
 Use of intertextuality
 The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources

Collaboration

Use of intertextuality
 The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources
 Lack of collaboration with others

Interacting with Text

Creative identification with the reading
 Use of intertextuality
 Not much interaction with sources
 The paper is made up of bits and pieces from sources scattered all over
 Student is not using the ideas of outside authors to form new ones on their own
 The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources
 Aren't they supposed to bring other people's ideas in?

Sources

Ethical, appropriate, accurate use of sources

Summary

Succinct summary

Analysis

Good use of analysis
 No retrospective analysis

Documentation

Use of citations
 Good use of signal phrasing
 Documents claims in the retrospective, like a lawyer
 Awareness of audience's need for source introduction
 Aren't they supposed to quote and use attributive tags?
 Lack of support
 Few citations
 Absence of documentation
 Plagiarism

Organization

Semblance of organization
 Good symmetry
 Stays on track
 Form comes from content
 The thesis appears at the end of the essay
 No organization

Examples Explain Concepts

Plenty of details and quotes
 Good use of specificity
 Examples and analysis used
 Needs to add more examples
 Few supporting examples
 No details; broad sweeps
 Doesn't explain significance of the evidence

Reader

Catchy title
 The best writing is writing you don't notice
 It is best to leave out what readers will skip
 Is the text engaging?
 Is it interesting?
 No obstacles while reading
 No attributive tags appear, which is disturbing
 I expected more
 Less and less reader friendly

Other

Diction (including accuracy); Accuracy of grammar, language, spelling; Plagiarism; Students rise to challenge that is set; Is the text engaging?; Is it interesting?; The best writing is writing you don't notice; It is best to leave out what readers will skip; Originality/depth; Following directions; Misses focus of assignment; Good example of what is meant by the conversation metaphor; Use of citations; Absence of documentation; Plenty of details and quotes; No organization; Doesn't explain significance of the evidence; Confident voice; Recognizes transitions as a tool for cohesion; Writer identifies areas of improvement in the retrospective; No retrospective analysis; Catchy title

APPENDIX D

Descriptors Identified by Faculty as Relevant to an Assessment of Sample Portfolios at the Spring 2004 End-of-Semester Portfolio Reading

The categories in *italic* were generated at the Spring Workshop, held February 2004 (Appendix B). The descriptors under the categories were generated at the Fall Portfolio Reading, December 2003 (Appendix C).

H = High (Above Passing), M = Medium (Passing),
L = Low (Below Passing)

H	M	L					
						<i>Metacognition</i>	
			<i>Intellectual Complexity</i>	8	3	0	Connections with goals made in retrospective
13	2	0	Thoughtful	6	2	0	Shows understanding of the process
13	2	0	Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work	7	2	0	Thoughtful evaluation of peer response
9	2	0	Intelligent ideas	8	2	0	Student able to be critical of own writing
11	3	1	Originality	4	3	0	Discussion of process is good
6	2	1	Original format	3	2	0	Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work
6	0	1	Complexity of ideas and thought should be a first priority	4	3	0	Good discussion of peer response in the Portfolio Writer's Statement
5	4	0	Attempts at originality	1	3	0	Concepts are explained in the retrospective, but no details are provided to support what the concepts mean
0	4	2	Students who follow <i>ABCW</i> are doomed to a boring, successful essay				
0	7	6	Superficial revision, based on literal reading of what instructor asks				<i>Critical Thinking</i>
				11	0	3	Grapples with complexity
				11	1	0	Intelligent ideas
			<i>Make Content Their Own</i>				
15	1	0	Personal investment	4	1	0	Class is about thinking and ideas
0	8	1	The papers merely meet the criteria as the student understands them	0	4	4	Too much binary thinking

			<i>Style/Voice</i>				<i>Language/Text</i>
12	3	1	Good sense of style	6	2	0	An attempt at open-form prose
14	3	1	Good use of voice	5	0	0	Makes the language their own
8	1	0	Focus	9	1	1	Clarity and conciseness evident
6	0	0	Stylistic devices like repetition and metaphor	5	0	0	Narrative thoughtful
7	1	0	Use of sentence variety	8	6	0	A clear thesis exists
7	2	0	Sincerity	6	4	0	Relevant details
				0	3	5	The student slips into research paper mode
			<i>Tone</i>	0	1	7	Paper isn't obviously a synthesis
12	0	1	Strong thesis	8	2	0	Underdeveloped paragraphs
6	1	0	Enthusiasm	8	1	0	Poor introductions
8	2	0	Sincerity				
1	0	0	Confident voice				<i>Develop Topic</i>
1	3	3	Narrow angle of vision	3	0	2	Very specific ideas and details necessary
				0	1	3	Without details, the essay falls apart
			<i>Use of Language</i>	0	2	10	Weak thesis
10	0	0	Has fun with the language				
10	0	0	Clarity				<i>Reading, Writing, Thinking Connections</i>
6	1	1	Good use of signal phrasing	8	2	0	Connections made
7	2	0	Thoughtful use of language	10	0	0	Creative identification with the reading
6	2	0	Connecting with transitions	0	1	8	The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources
1	0	1	Wonderful use of verbs				
2	3	2	Good use of language				<i>Reading Comprehension</i>
0	3	5	Uses language like "I feel" too much	0	4	6	Superficial revision, based on literal reading of what instructor asks
0	0	9	No attributive tags appear, which is disturbing	0	0	9	Misses the point of the texts being used
0	0	12	No transitions appear between the major parts of the essay				

			<i>Summary</i>				<i>Interacting with Text</i>
7	2	0	Succinct summary	6	1	0	Creative identification with the reading
				6	1	0	Use of intertextuality
			<i>Analysis</i>	0	4	7	Not much interaction with sources
6	0	0	Good use of analysis	0	1	4	The paper is made up of bits and pieces from sources scattered all over
			<i>Interacting with Text</i>	1	1	7	The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources
6	1	0	Creative identification with the reading	0	1	8	Student is not using the ideas of outside authors to form new ones on their own
10	1	0	Use of intertextuality	0	1	9	The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources
0	4	7	Not much interaction with sources	0	0	6	Aren't they supposed to bring other people's ideas in?
0	1	4	The paper is made up of bits and pieces from sources scattered all over				<i>Sources</i>
1	1	7	The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources	2	4	6	Ethical, appropriate, accurate use of sources
0	1	9	Student is not using the ideas of outside authors to form new ones on their own				<i>Documentation</i>
0	0	6	Aren't they supposed to bring other people's ideas in?	9	0	0	Good use of signal phrasing
			<i>Conversation</i>	3	0	0	Documents claims in the retrospective, like a lawyer
7	2	0	The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources	7	0	2	Awareness of audience's need for source introduction
3	2	1	Use of intertextuality	0	0	5	Aren't they supposed to quote and use attributive tags?
			<i>Collaboration</i>	0	0	10	Lack of support
4	1	1	Use of intertextuality	0	1	9	Few citations
1	4	5	The writer doesn't have a conversation with the sources				<i>Challenge</i>
0	1	2	Lack of collaboration with others	1	1	0	I wish we had more challenging assignments
				0	1	0	Standards we have for students can be too high

			<i>Effort/Improvement</i>				<i>Risk Taking</i>
5	2	0	Gets into analysis	8	3	2	Risk taking by moving beyond own belief
8	1	0	The more challenging essays were chosen for the portfolio	3	2	1	Tries to make subject matter changes between drafts
4	4	0	Tries to make subject-matter changes between drafts	0	4	0	There is weakness in being a slave to text models
2	1	0	Good drafts, full of information	1	13	0	The writer has produced safe essays
1	2	0	Meeting assignment should be second to complexity of ideas	1	5	5	No new idea emerges from the synthesis
2	3	1	Development of writing	1	8	6	No stretching, no risking
4	6	0	Attempts at creativity	0	4	5	Writing safely leads to boring essays with a lack of development
1	4	0	Student tries hard to do what assignment asks	0	3	9	Lack of understanding the need to stretch
1	5	1	Making progress on papers while revising				
0	1	0	We need to prize what students do in their work				
3	8	2	Evidence of revision	10	2	0	<i>Engaging Texts</i> Engages other texts
1	5	2	Meeting the assignment expectations	1	0	1	Text should have connection to other sources
0	0	3	A new draft is needed	0	0	5	I didn't see engagement happening
0	3	7	Superficial revision, based on literal reading of what instructor asks				
0	0	8	It is obvious little time is put into revising papers, which results in products that are less polished	3	0	0	<i>See Context</i> Use of intertextuality
1	1	4	Less revision				

Questioning

2	0	0	Are subject-matter questions addressed?
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Engagement with Topic

5	0	0	More ideas apparent and more examples lead to fascinating papers
5	2	0	Interesting stuff appears
10	2	0	Engagement with the subject

<i>Rhetorical Choices</i>			<i>Organization</i>				
2	0	0	Uses gaps in open-form prose	4	1	0	Good symmetry
12	2	1	The student did a good job of showing rather than telling	2	0	1	The thesis appears at the end of the essay
9	2	2	Audience awareness	6	2	2	Stays on track
5	1	0	Interesting story-telling techniques	3	1	0	Form comes from content
3	2	0	Essay becomes stronger as we move through it	2	4	0	Semblance of organization
1	2	0	Documents claims in the retrospective, like a lawyer	0	0	1	No organization
0	6	3	The essay doesn't create tension like we'd expect				<i>Structure</i>
0	0	10	I couldn't get the author's point	5	1	1	I like when students have a nice idea structure
0	1	9	Lack of purpose in how points are presented	4	4	0	The writer did think about structure in his narrative
0	0	8	Split focus shifts around no plan	2	2	0	Narrative has good form
0	2	7	Didn't see synthesis	3	2	1	Helping students develop structure in their essays is important
0	0	10	No audience awareness	0	5	1	Better transitions are needed
0	0	6	Audience development needed in writer's statement	0	3	1	Emphasis on structure, prevents critical thinking
0	0	1	Prove it to me	1	2	1	I don't mind if the structure comes across as boring
0	0	1	Is the essay a summary/strong response?	0	2	4	Paper isn't obviously a synthesis
			<i>Arrangement</i>	0	1	7	No transitions appear between the major parts of the narrative
6	2	0	Nice introduction	0	1	9	Wanders in tangents
8	0	0	Nice sharp thesis that previews the complexity of the discussion	0	1	7	Redundant
7	1	0	Good division of paragraphs				
4	3	0	Hung together well				
3	2	0	Connection with transitions				
0	0	9	The paper is made up of bits and pieces from sources scattered all over				
0	0	2	The thesis appears at the end of the essay				
0	1	6	Lack of transitions				

			<i>Reader</i>				<i>Examples Explain Concepts</i>
7	2	1	No obstacles while reading	13	1	1	Good use of specificity
0	5	2	I expected more	6	3	0	Examples and analysis used
0	0	6	No attributive tags appear, which is disturbing	0	5	4	Needs to add more examples
0	0	8	Less and less reader friendly	0	2	8	Few supporting examples
				1	1	11	No details; broad sweeps

Student as Writer

8	0	0	Ability to take a stand, to argue
5	0	0	Sense of humor
3	0	0	The student wrestles with ideas between drafts
8	2	0	Insightful point of view
4	1	0	Honest
8	2	0	Makes the language their own
9	2	0	Understands academic conventions
4	1	0	Sense of comfort with process
1	1	0	Some of this writing is a big leap for students
1	0	0	Shows understanding that writing is difficult, often frustrating, and hard work
1	5	0	Writing safely OK for inexperienced writers
0	5	0	There is weakness in being a slave to text models
0	3	1	Students seem to perceive that the amount of time spent on an essay equals quality
0	1	5	Students are revising for the first time

APPENDIX E

Reorganization of Descriptors into Possible Rubric Based on Responses at the Spring 2004 End-of-Semester Portfolio Reading (Guided by Faculty Desire for a Rubric)

VERY HIGH QUALITY

Intellectual complexity is demonstrated by presenting interesting ideas in an original way. It is obvious that the writer understands that writing involves difficult, even frustrating, work. The writer shows that he or she can grapple with complexity.

The writer demonstrates good understanding of his or her own writing process through thoughtful evaluation of peer response, thoughtful evaluation and critique of his or her process in writer's statements and the retrospective, and appropriate connections to the course goals in the retrospective. There is good analysis in the retrospective and the writer identifies areas of improvement in the writing of the portfolio.

The writer has made a personal investment in the writing, and as a result, makes the content his or her own.

The writer shows a good sense of style in his or her texts. There is a good use of voice and that voice is sincere, confident, and enthusiastic. There is a good use of sentence variety. Stylistic devices like repetition and metaphor are used. The papers show focus, with a narrow angle of vision.

The writer has fun with the language, uses good signal phrasing, and connects ideas with transition phrasing. There is a wonderful use of sentence parts, like verbs, adjectives, and so on. The writer is obviously making the language his or her own, and doing so while using grammar, spelling, and punctuation accurately. This work with the language leads to writing overall which is both engaging and clear. (In fact, it may be so good that you don't notice it.)

The writer makes connections with the text or the texts he or she has read. The writer appears to have a conversation with the sources, and the connections each can be seen as a creative identification with the reading. In addition, the sources are used accurately, ethically, and appropriately. No plagiarism occurs.

Good summaries of texts occur and good use of analysis appears. In fact, the writer appears to enjoy working with analysis and the analytical process in their essays.

The writer addresses subject-matter problems in his or her essay.

The writer attempts to move beyond his or her own belief while revising.

In the process, subject matter changes are apparent between drafts.

The writer engages his or her topic by providing interesting examples.

In addition, the examples very specifically relate to the overall discussion and their relationship to the discussion is explained.

Because of this work with examples, the papers prove more interesting to read.

The writer uses a structure in his or her essays that show that the writer has been thinking carefully about how the information in his or her paper is organized. As a result, the writer stays on track throughout the essay.

Overall, the papers of the portfolio show that the writer can take a stand, that the writer understands academic conventions, that he or she has a sense of comfort with the writing process, that he or she works to make the language his or her own, that he or she writes with an insightful point of view, and that he or she even writes with a sense of humor. The titles of the papers are catchy and the assignments' guidelines have been followed.

HIGH QUALITY

The writer makes attempts at being original.

The writer shows understanding that writing is difficult and often frustrating work. The discussion of his or her process in the portfolio retrospective is good, and there is a good discussion of the role of peer response in the development of the essays.

Where appropriate, a clear thesis appears and the details are relevant to the discussion in the essay.

The intertextual use of outside sources is good.

The drafts of the portfolio are good and full of information. During revision, the writer attempts to make subject-matter changes between drafts. The writer meets the assignments of the papers submitted, but the writer also actively works with the complexity of the ideas he or she is using. As a result, the writer shows him- or herself to be creative in approaching the assignment.

The essays of the portfolio become stronger as we move through them.

Claims in the retrospective are asserted, as if the writer is a lawyer making a case for the audience.

The information in the papers of the portfolio hangs together well, and good connections are made with transitions. It is obvious that the writer thought about the structure of his or her papers and a good structure for each paper appears.

PASSING QUALITY

In the retrospective, course concepts are identified or explained, but no details are offered to support what the concepts mean.

A good use of language appears in the essays of the portfolio.

Sources are used ethically, accurately, and appropriately.

The writer appears to be trying hard to do what the assignments ask.

Evidence of revision appears and progress on papers occurs during the revision process. The essays of the portfolio meet assignment expectations, although the essays are safe and there is a weakness in being a slave to text models.

Being a slave to models is apparent in the structure of the essays, for the writer appears overly concerned to organize his or her essay safely, interfering with a creative and critical approach to the topic. Better transitions may be needed between parts of the essay.

The writer appears to understand that writing can be difficult, even frustrating work, but the approach to revision may suggest that the writer believes that the amount of time spent on an essay will automatically translate into more quality in the writing. In other words, the writer struggles some with how to go about revising effectively.

NOT QUITE PASSING

Essays may follow what an assignment asks, but offer an audience little.

The audience may decide that the essay is boring to read because little tension or development is apparent. (In fact, a reader may come away from the essay thinking, "I expected more.")

The essays depend too much on binary thinking; in other words, the writer fails to "wallow" in the complexities of the issues written about.

The essays are written with a very narrow angle of vision.

The writer uses language like "I feel" too much (in other words, the writer hedges too often, which prevents the writer from sounding confident.)

Essays are written as if they are research papers or book reports in which the writer writes for the teacher only, explaining to the

teacher what he or she knows or has learned. Few examples may be used to back up ideas.

Revision of the papers appears to be based on a literal reading of what the teacher wants, rather than a thoughtful analysis of how the essay may appeal better to a real audience.

There is little to no interaction with the sources used; the writer fails to have a conversation with the sources.

The writing in the portfolio shows that no risk taking is occurring. The writer may struggle to complete assignment goals. Revision leads to essays that lack development.

FAILING

While reading the essays of the portfolio, a reader may struggle to understand the writer's point. They may also perceive that the writer lacks a purpose in how to go about presenting points. For example, there may be a split focus to the essay, or the focus may shift around.

No audience awareness appears in the essays or in the writer's statements.

The reader may come away confused about which assignment the essay is for.

No transitions appear between the major parts of the essay.

If sources are used, the writer misses the point of the sources, or no conversation occurs with the sources. The sources may appear in bits and pieces scattered all over the essay rather than used cohesively. The sources are not being used to form new ideas (the writer is being a slave to the sources). Few citations may appear. No attributive tags appear.

Parts of the essays, such as the introduction or subsequent paragraphs, may be underdeveloped or poorly written.

A weak thesis appears and the essay appears to fall apart because of a lack of details and lack of support.

Revision, if it occurs, is superficial, and it is based on a literal reading of what the instructor wants. Because little time has been put into revising, the essays are less polished: it is obvious new drafts are needed.

A lack of understanding of the need to stretch appears in the essays. As a result, a lack of engagement is apparent.

The writing of the essays is redundant, or it wanders in tangents: little thought has been given to the organization. The essays become less and less reader friendly the more one reads.

The portfolio retrospective offers no analysis.

APPENDIX F

Approaching Grades in English W131: The UnRubric

The following descriptions show what we value in student writing in the IUPUI writing program and are designed to be a guide to grading decisions in English W131. They emerge from our discussions over the past year about what we find true about portfolios that are “Passing” (baseline to pass the course), “Better than Passing” (A or B work), and “Below Passing” (C-, D, or F work).

The passing descriptions are more detailed because this is the level student work must reach to pass the course. At the “Better than Passing” and “Below Passing” levels, the assumption is that one begins with the passing descriptions and then considers the merits of a portfolio given the additional information of the other two lists.

As stated above, this document is designed to be a guide to grading. Individual faculty will determine a portfolio’s grade with the following descriptions in mind. In general, portfolios that reflect what is discussed in the “Passing” section below hit the mark and pass; portfolios that hit above the mark earn a higher evaluation; and portfolios that hit below the mark fail to pass.

PASSING

Text Engagement through Writing:

- The writer is able to read critically by engaging with ideas and texts, questioning some ideas he or she reads, adding to or enhancing others, and indicating why the questioning or enhancing is a good idea
- The writer uses summary, synthesis and analysis appropriately when engaging sources in his or her text
- The writer comprehends the purposes of summarizing, paraphrasing, and responding to sources
- The writer also comprehends the difference between summarizing, paraphrasing, and responding to sources
- The writer attempts to create or represent a conversation on the topic he or she is writing about through the use of outside sources
- The writer has some awareness of the value of attributive tags in creating or representing a conversation of his or her topic (i.e., language that signals or references the source of information)
- Sources are used accurately, ethically, and appropriately. No plagiarism.
- The writer uses examples to engage his or her topic appropriately and sufficiently.

Develop Ideas Beyond Familiar Thinking:

- The writer attempts to move beyond familiar thinking by actively engaging with outside ideas from texts, classmates, and the instructor
- The writer develops reasonable questions, responses, and assertions in the process of challenging his or her own thinking or the thinking of others
- The writer attempts original ideas in his or her papers while keeping readers’ needs in mind

Revision:

- The writer responds to feedback from peers and instructor by implementing changes in a text
- The writer challenges his or her previous ideas by posing new questions
- The writer revises aspects of his or her paper as ideas are challenged
- The writer approaches his or her revision strategy as an extension of the composing process that helped him or her produce previous drafts

Developmental and Organizational Strategies:

- The writer uses questions and prewriting activities to generate drafts
- Essay introductions lead readers into the essay and introduce the essay's topic
- In thesis-based essays, thesis statements appear early, forecasting content and asserting a debatable position
- The writer also recognizes the value of using a variety of organizational patterns that promote his or her purpose, the interests of the audience, and the communication of the thesis or theme
- Paragraph topic sentences are used to relate to an essay's main idea (its thesis or theme)
- Supporting details in paragraphs expand ideas expressed in topic sentences, giving fuller meaning to an essay's theme or thesis
- The writer demonstrates understanding that strategies of coherence (transitional phrasing and the thoughtful repetition, restatement, or "echoing" of words and phrases) help move a reader forward through an essay
- Essays conclude in an appropriate and even meaningful way
- Reflective writing demonstrates the intent to develop an active writing process

Final Product:

- The papers follow instructions and guidelines
- It is apparent that papers address interesting questions
- The papers show focus
- Drafts may have grammar and usage errors, but they do not interfere with the clarity of ideas
- Evidence of revision appears
- The writer can write thoughtfully about his or her process of composing and drafting a paper in writer's statements
- The writer can assert claims in the retrospective about how well course goals have been achieved as if the writer is a lawyer making a case for the audience
- Analysis in the retrospective also identifies areas of improvement and opportunities for continued growth (the writer can be critical of his or her own writing)
- Each paper has as a title that summarizes what the essay is about
- MLA documentation style is used appropriately with few errors

BETTER THAN PASSING**Text Engagement through Writing:**

- A creative identification with the reading is evident in the writing
- The writer uses attributive tags and transitional phrasing to create an interesting, if not compelling, conversation with the sources
- Because of how the writer uses examples, the essays of the portfolio prove more interesting to read
- The examples the writer uses show a deeper engagement with the topic

Developmental and Organizational Strategies:

- Drafts of the portfolio are compelling to read because the writer grapples with complexity from draft to draft
- Drafts of the portfolio become stronger as one reads them
- It is apparent the writer has thought carefully about how to organize the papers found in the portfolio; the writing stays on track
- Textual features like transitional phrasing and the thoughtful repetition, restatement, or "echoing" of words and phrases help to create topical coherence in the essay, leading to compelling reading.

Develop Ideas Beyond Familiar Thinking:

- The writer shows that intellectual complexity is an important priority
- The writer obviously takes risks
- The writer expresses truly creative ideas and insights
- The writer creatively adapts to the assignments

Revision:

- The writer moves beyond his or her initial conceptions while revising. In the process, subject matter changes are apparent between drafts
- The writer thoughtfully responds to peer and instructor response
- Work with the language leads to writing that is both engaging and clear (In fact, it may be so good that you don't notice it.)

Final Product:

- The writer shows a good sense of style through stylistic devices like repetition, use of metaphor, and use of sentence variety
- As a result of the work with style and stylistic devices, a voice is apparent that is sincere, confident, and best of all, enthusiastic

- Reflective writing shows the writer can thoughtfully assess his or her writing and his or her writing process
- Reflective writing shows the writer has a sense of comfort with the writing process
- The writer appears to have fun with the language
- The writer obviously makes a personal investment in the writing (the texts read as if the writer “owns” or feels quite comfortable discussing the topics)
- A clear thesis (or theme, if relevant to the type of essay) appears and the details support an insightful point of view
- Paper titles are catchy
- MLA documentation style is used well

BELOW PASSING

Text Engagement through Writing:

- Few examples may be used to back up ideas
- If sources are used, the writer misses the point or misinterprets the sources
- Sources are used in bits and pieces scattered all over the essay rather than used cohesively
- There is little to no interaction (or conversation) with the sources
- Few citations appear, which suggests that the writer fails to understand that sources need documentation and credit

Developmental and Organizational Strategies:

- The writing lacks purpose, suggesting the writer is struggling with how to express his or her ideas
- There is weak organizational structure
- Little to no audience awareness appears in the essays and where appropriate, the reflective writing (The audience may decide that an essay is boring to read because little compels a reader to move on.)
- Weak transitions appear between the major parts of essays
- Reflective writing offers no analysis of the writer’s own process

Develop Ideas Beyond Familiar Thinking:

- The writing in the portfolio shows that no risk taking is occurring
- Essays depend too much on binary thinking
- The writer fails to grapple with the complexities of issues

Revision:

- Revision is superficial, because based on a literal reading of what the instructor wants rather than a thoughtful analysis of how an essay may better appeal to an audience
- Because little time has been put into revising, the essays are less polished: it is obvious that additional drafts are needed

Final Product:

- Papers are written as if book reports for the teacher rather than essays for a larger audience
- The writer struggles to complete assignment goals
- A reader may come away from the essay thinking, “I expected more”
- The essays become less and less reader friendly the more one reads
- Essays may follow what an assignment asks, but offer an audience few insights
- The essays reveal little to no audience awareness
- Problems with grammar and usage interfere with clarity
- Failure to document appropriately using MLA style

APPENDIX G

ENGLISH W131 COURSE GOALS

When you've successfully completed English W131, you will be able to create portfolios that demonstrate that you can:

- Use questions to challenge, develop, and analyze ideas that may take you beyond familiar thinking
- Demonstrate your ability to read critically by engaging with ideas and texts, properly summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting others' ideas while effectively integrating them into your writing
- Choose and develop a variety of organizational patterns for your writing, keeping in mind the purpose, audience, and thesis or theme
- Develop your text and other writing projects by presenting appropriate and sufficient detail
- Use appropriate documentation
- Use language and style appropriate to your writing
- Base your decisions about your writing projects on participation in peer response and other collaborative activities
- Plan, draft, revise, and edit effectively
- Reflect on your writing and reading processes

6

PUTTING PLACEMENT ON THE MAP

Bowling Green State University

Eric Stalions

LOCAL CONTEXT

As a doctoral student in the Rhetoric and Writing Program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Bowling Green, Ohio, I adapted Bob Broad's (2003) dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) research model to identify, analyze, and map the rhetorical values or criteria that guided the General Studies Writing placement program's evaluators in placing students into one of the first-year writing courses in 2006. Located in Bowling Green, Ohio, BGSU serves approximately 23,000 students through 200 undergraduate majors and programs, 64 master's degree programs, and 17 doctoral programs. The purpose of the study was to present a focused validation argument to strengthen the relationship between the placement program's communal writing assessment practices and the writing program's curriculum and to provide a general heuristic for writing program administrators to investigate the evaluative criteria of their placement program's rhetorical assessment practices.

The study was situated within General Studies Writing, a well-established, independent writing program. The program serves approximately 4,000 undergraduates each semester, has an independent budget, 40 full-time instructors, an assistant director, an associate director, a director, and an administrative staff (Nelson-Beene 2006). The program employs standardized in-house placement and portfolio assessment processes. As a participant-observer, an insider in the program, I brought particular perspectives to the study—perspectives informed by three years of involvement in this writing program. I served as a placement evaluator for the summer 2005 placement program, a member of the 2006 General Studies Writing placement prompt committee, the assistant placement coordinator for the 2006 placement program, an assistant to the director during the 2005-06 academic year, and a graduate instructor from 2003 to 2005.

Alternative assessment theories challenge us to consider assessment within a complicated rhetorical context. As a whole, the alternative assessment movement seeks to move beyond scientific notions of reliability and validity to promote rhetorical assessment. In seeking approaches to valid assessment that align validity with ethical and social concerns as well as with statistical concerns, alternative assessments seek to create new understandings of writing.

Susanmarie Harrington, "What Maps Mean for Assessment and Planning"

Susanmarie Harrington (2008) explained that new theories of alternative assessments, most notably the dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) methodology, "promise richer approaches to validating writing assessment and better connections to curriculum and faculty development." The "alternative assessments" in this collection demonstrate how the DCM process created or reshaped assessment practices organically to produce more valid assessments of student writing. In the previous chapter, for instance, Harrington and Weeden describe how intense, collaborative, DCM work produced program documents and assessments that responded directly to the needs of faculty, students, and the general public.

Unlike my co-authors, however, I applied DCM, an approach most often used in exit- and outcome-based assessments, to placement assessment theory and practice. In a study of the General Studies Writing program's placement readers at BGSU, I adapted DCM to present a validation argument, based upon criteria maps, codebooks, and glossaries, to strengthen the relationship between the placement readers' evaluative practices and the writing program's curriculum.

Here we find yet another example of how DCM can be useful for facilitating locally contextualized, discipline-appropriate assessments that serve a variety of purposes. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

Additionally, I provide a theoretical heuristic for writing program administrators interested in using DCM, and the documents it produces, in their local placement assessment contexts.

DCM AND PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT

Educators can use DCM to study and understand placement assessment practices: current exit assessment theory and pedagogy can be applied to placement assessment theory and pedagogy. I used DCM at BGSU because theoretically criteria mapping can be employed in any placement program that utilizes Broad's (2003) communal writing assessment, a pedagogy grounded in Broad and Boyd's (2005) "theory of complementarity." The theory of complementarity, which involves a rhetorical, democratic,

constructivist writing assessment process wherein assessors publicly convince “one another through a process of disputing conflicting truth claims and negotiating contingent, communally sanctioned truths through discourse” (Broad and Boyd 2005, 10-13), offers the theoretical model for communal writing assessment pedagogy: “two or more judges working to reach a joint decision on the basis of a writing performance” (Broad 1997, 134). In fact, this study examined and illuminated the value of complementarity as a theoretical rationale for communal writing assessment practices.

Because complementarity identifies how DCM investigates the values of educators born out of communal, collaborative assessment deliberations, it is reasonable to use complementarity as a theoretical framework for studying communal writing assessment practices in placement assessment contexts, namely the General Studies Writing placement program’s evaluative practices. Broad (2003) examined trios of instructors engaged in exit communal writing assessment whereas I studied evaluator pairs engaged in communal placement assessment. In particular, placement evaluators came to a mutually shared, communal consensus for each placement.

I studied the placement program because its evaluative practices reflected an important social constructivist principle of exit assessment theory: educators must assess writing within the local contexts of their curricula. Placement program evaluators, experienced program instructors, directly placed students into “actual courses” within the curriculum (General Studies Writing Program 2006-07, *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook*, 1). In other words, the placement program relied upon teachers’ curricular expertise to place students into writing courses, the prevalent placement assessment model.

Indeed, Harrington (2005) explained that William Smith and Richard Haswell’s “expert scoring systems,” in which teachers make placement decisions, has become the “dominant mode of scoring for direct placement tests” (21). Foregrounding the importance of a writing program’s curriculum in placement decisions, Smith (1993) and Haswell (1998, 2001) provided theoretical and pedagogical rationales for the value of placement evaluators’ curricular, “expert” knowledge and experience in making direct, socially-constructed placement decisions. According to Smith’s (1993) placement procedures at the University of Pittsburgh, raters taught the courses in which they placed the students, for “the raters must have the privileged knowledge of students that can only come from teaching the courses,” and they must rely on their knowledge of these courses for placement (174). Using prototype theory, Haswell (2001) developed a “two-tier method” in which teacher-readers placed students into their courses because the placement essays were similar to essays written in them (58). Patricia Lynne (2004) explained that “expert reader,”

“constructivist,” placement models and alternative research methods have been developed to answer questions that earlier objective assessment models could not (75). This DCM study offers one such alternative research method.

**THE FOCUSED VALIDATION STUDY:
THE CURRICULUM-ASSESSMENT CONNECTION**

In this validation study, I wanted to answer one specific question about assessment in the spirit of *What We Really Value* (Broad 2003): Do we really value what we say we really value? In other words, to what extent did the placement evaluators real-time assessments (what we really value) actually reflect the placement program’s carefully crafted documents and training procedures (what we say we really value)? The purpose of my validation inquiry was to use DCM to examine how well placement readers’ evaluative practices reflected the writing program’s curricular values articulated in placement program procedures and documents. (See Stalions 2007 for the description of this validation study.) The study resulted in a validation argument: I provided the writing program with several recommendations, based upon DCM documents, to strengthen the placement program’s assessment-curriculum connection. Additionally, a theoretical heuristic grew out of the study’s findings, which writing program administrators may develop and grow locally.

Eric’s approach reminds us that DCM’s underlying theory has applications in multiple assessment settings. Whatever the assessment context, we do well to remember that validation arguments are an important part of any program’s assessment work. *Harrington and Weeden*

As a rule of thumb, what we assess should be connected to what we teach. White (1989, 1994, 1995, 2005) has called on institutions to enact local, contextualized placement programs that reflect and support writing curricula. His scholarship has long illustrated that a validity inquiry must consider the relationship between placement assessment practices and corresponding curricula (1989, 1994, 2001). Similarly, Broad (2003) argued that assessment validity is “a quality of the decisions people make” (10); in order for a writing assessment to be valid, “it must judge students according to the same skills and values by which they have been taught” (11). To rephrase Broad’s words in light of this DCM validity inquiry, in order for a placement assessment to be valid, “it must judge students according to the same skills and values by which they *will* [italics added] be taught.”

One of the most appealing aspects of DCM when we began our discussions about another programmatic assessment at UNR (copies of the previous programmatic assessment were sitting in 4-inch binders on several shelves collecting dust despite its comprehensive and valuable contributions) was to create an assessment tool that could assess our program by judging student writing using the values from which they were taught. Achieving this took many conversations and negotiations but it also inspired a commitment to assessing and teaching from those shared values. *Detweiler and McBride*

Pamela Moss (1998) explained that in addition to examining scores, or the “meaningfulness of placement decisions,” the program’s course goals, assignments, and learning outcomes, must be investigated (117). Peggy O’Neill (2003) recognized that placement assessment must be informed by course assessment and outcomes, and she concluded that placement assessment programs cannot be sustained or improved in the absence of “appropriate validation inquiry” (62). However, the current DCM study neither attempted to validate the numerous aspects of the placement program, such as Smith’s longitudinal validation inquiry of the placement program at the University of Pittsburgh, nor endeavored to validate the substance of the writing program’s online placement test, in the fashion of a traditional content validity study. (See O’Neill 2003 for a case-study of William L. Smith’s placement model, which is based upon multiple types of validation evidence.) This study was singularly focused on strengthening the curriculum-assessment connection between placement readers’ evaluations and the writing program’s curricular values.

THE ONLINE WRITING PLACEMENT TEST MODEL

For the placement program’s 2006-07 online writing placement test, students read a short academic article and wrote a persuasive essay in response to one of three prompts at a secure, password protected, university website. I served on the 2006 placement prompt committee with the program’s associate director and three full-time instructors to choose reading selections and write accompanying prompts for the online writing placement test for the 2006-07 academic year.

Students were given 24 hours to write and submit their placement essays at this website, and they could log in and out as many times as they liked within this time period. This 24-hour submission window encouraged students to use the process-approach in composing their essays (General Studies Writing Program 2006-07, *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook*, 28-30). Based upon this placement model, which called for persuasive, process-based essays, evaluators employed direct assessment procedures to evaluate

writing samples to place students directly into a course sequence that values both process writing and argumentation.

The online writing placement test foregrounded academic persuasive writing—the heart of the writing program’s curriculum. The program’s two-course sequence, English 110: Developmental Writing or English 111: Introductory Writing, and English 112: Varieties of Writing, emphasized the “principles of academic arguments” with respect to expository writing. English 110, a five-hour semester course, provides more instruction in grammar, usage, and mechanics than English 111, a three-hour course. Once passing either English 110 or English 111, students enroll in English 112, a three-hour course. Required of all BGSU students, English 112 emphasizes “critical and analytical” reading and writing skills in writing persuasive essays, critiques, and researched essays (General Studies Writing Program 2006-2007, *Instructors’ Handbook*, 31-33). As a graduate instructor, I taught English 111 and English 112 for the writing program. With regard to curricular materials, I served as an assistant to the director of the writing program during the 2005-06 academic school year. In particular, I wrote, revised, and edited programmatic materials, such as manuals and teaching resources.

Eight graduate instructors who had taught English 111 and English 112 placed the authors of approximately 4,000 essays directly into one of these courses in the summer of 2006. Working with the placement coordinator, I oversaw the day-to-day operations of the 2006 placement program; assisted in training and calibration sessions; and made final placement decisions when evaluators disagreed with one another. As a placement evaluator for the 2005 placement program, I had collaborated with another evaluator to place essays.

Placement evaluators independently placed essays and recorded placement decisions on note sheets, and then they came back together in pairs to decide the placement for each essay. The placement coordinator instructed them to follow the General Studies Writing (2006-07) *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook*, which described entrance-level textual features or criteria for each placement category—English 110, English 111, and English 112. During this process, evaluators used “shared vocabulary for discussing placement criteria and decisions” (1). If evaluators could not agree on a placement, either the placement coordinator or I arbitrated the disagreement and made the final placement decision after reading the essay a third time.

THE RESEARCH METHODS: VALIDATION THROUGH DCM EXPLORATION

What could be the value of studying a placement program that was, by all accounts, a success? The program had been placing students into

appropriate classes by all anecdotal accounts (everyone said the placement program was working well) and statistical reports (the placement coordinator described positive placement data and analyses in the annual “Placement Statistics” report, which included “Placement Results” and “Pass/Fail Ratios and Grade Distributions”).

The value of this DCM study was to explore, not confirm, actual assessment practices in answering Broad’s (2003) challenge to unearth what we really value in assessing writing. In particular, I wanted to discover what rhetorical values actually guided the placement program evaluators in placing students into first-year writing courses and to determine to what degree those values were aligned with placement documents and training sessions. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for the full list of the principal and supporting research questions.) This focus explores the question, “Do we really value what we say we really value?”

Although the online placement program model began in 2004, the writing program had not yet conducted a qualitative study of the placement program’s evaluative practices. As a result, my motivation for conducting this study was to provide the writing program with both a qualitative and quantitative research model for discovering, understanding, and discussing what evaluators really valued in making real-time placement decisions and to use this information to strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection.

The discovery, not confirmation, of curricular values was achieved through the application of grounded theory. In this study, my application of grounded theory did not involve identifying curricular criteria described in placement program documents and then cherry picking those same criteria from the transcripts; this approach would only prove what I already knew about the program. Rather, I used grounded theory to find as many criteria as possible in the transcripts, compare these criteria to curricular criteria, and then develop theory. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998) explained that the researcher using grounded theory “begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (12).

Because the purpose of the study was to see how well assessment practices were aligned with the curriculum, I transcribed and studied every taped conversation of four evaluator pairs, every placement training session, and every norming session over a six-week period from June to July 2006. In addition, I studied the placement program’s training procedures and documents. The study’s analysis centered on data collected from nine participants: four pairs of placement evaluators and the placement coordinator. The placement coordinator oversaw the 2005 and 2006 placement programs, and the placement evaluators were graduate instructors who had taught English 111 and English 112 in the program. As a result, there were two principal data sets: the placement evaluators’ synchronous, audio-taped

conversations and the placement coordinator's program training and documents. This particular data analysis focus was informed by a pilot study, which examined the design of the online writing placement test. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for a discussion of how the pilot study informed the study's research methodology.) Moreover, the study focused on placement evaluators' real-time, audio-taped conversations because Broad's (2003) DCM study prioritized the rhetorical values or criteria educators actually used in portfolio assessment over recollections of these values.

I studied the transcribed evaluators' discussions to uncover the criteria that the four pairs of evaluators used in placing students into the three writing courses, and I examined the placement program's training and documents to reveal the writing program's stated curricular criteria. Once the evaluators' rhetorical criteria were represented in the dynamic criteria maps and codebooks, these criteria could be compared to the placement program's stated curricular values.

Following Broad's (2003) lead, I used Charmaz's (2000) "constructivist grounded theory" data analysis approach. I undertook Broad's three primary stages to collect, code, and describe the data generated from placement evaluators' discussions: "concurrent analysis," "comprehensive analysis," and "close analysis and verification" (Broad 2003, 28-31). Broad attributes these terms and techniques to grounded theory methodology as developed and discussed in Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1994, 1998). I adapted Broad's (1997, 2000, 2003) "concurrent analysis" procedures to discover and create the initial principal criteria categories; his "comprehensive analysis stage" to separate and describe criteria that evaluators used during their placement discussions; and his "constant comparative method" to create, organize, and reorganize criteria and corresponding textual and contextual examples into placement categories for each pair. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for a detailed explanation of this study's application of constructivist grounded theory.)

From this data analysis process, I created several criteria-rich documents: in vivo examples, glossaries with "textual" and "contextual" definitions, quantitative codebooks, and most importantly, dynamic criteria maps. Though only the three most important documents are included here, the study produced about 400 pages of data and results. To compile the in vivo examples, the words and phrases taken directly from the transcripts, I imported hundreds of pages of placement evaluators' discussions into QSR International NVivo 7, a qualitative coding software program. While each text was coded and annotated line-by-line, individual criteria, comprised of phrases and sentences, were identified and entered into a corresponding Excel spreadsheet. I studied the in vivo examples for each criterion, and I created glossaries containing "textual" and/or "contextual" definitions

for each individual criterion. Broad (2003) explained that textual criteria involve “qualities or features of the text being judged” while contextual criteria entail “issues not directly related to the text being judged” (34). (Refer to Stalions 2007 for the in vivo examples and glossaries.)

This study’s grounded theory data analysis process culminated in the creation of one dynamic criteria map for each placement category, English 110, English 111, and English 112, and corresponding codebooks (refer to the criteria maps and codebooks on the following pages). I created the criteria maps to answer key research questions, which sought to uncover which rhetorical criteria evaluators frequently used to place essays, how criteria use was connected between and among evaluator pairs, how the passage of time affected criteria use, how “textual” and “contextual” criteria were employed, and most importantly, how these rhetorical values reflected the curricular criteria articulated in placement documents and training sessions. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for the principal and supporting research questions.)

To address these issues, each criteria map contains four constellations—one representing each placement evaluator pair—and each constellation includes each pair’s ten most-frequently-invoked criteria in making English 110, English 111, and English 112 placement decisions. Each map contains color coding, abbreviations, and notations to provide details about rhetorical criteria. The maps contain four keys, which provide explanations for the maps’ codes. For instance, the “Dynamic Criteria Map” key identifies related criteria in two or more constellations with the same color. Using notations and/or symbols, the “Curricular Criteria Key” illustrates connections between and among the writing program’s curricular criteria and the pairs’ evaluative criteria. The “Temporal Effect Key” identifies whether each criterion remained in the ten most frequently cited criteria list during the first and second halves of the placement program, and the “Textual and Contextual Criteria Key” indicates whether each evaluative criterion had textual and/or contextual meanings. The maps, however, cannot stand alone in representing evaluators’ criteria use; for more a more nuanced understanding of the criteria, the glossaries and in vivo examples must be consulted.

For a quick, statistical breakdown of each placement category, the “Quantitative Codebooks of Frequently Used Criteria” presents each pair’s ten most-frequently-invoked criteria in three codebooks—one for each placement category, English 110, English 111, and English 112. I selected the ten most-frequently-invoked criteria for each pair because these criteria taken together were employed by evaluation pairs between an estimated fifty to sixty percent of the time, and consequently, generally represent the most-frequently-invoked rhetorical criteria.

Fig 1. English 110 Dynamic Criteria Map

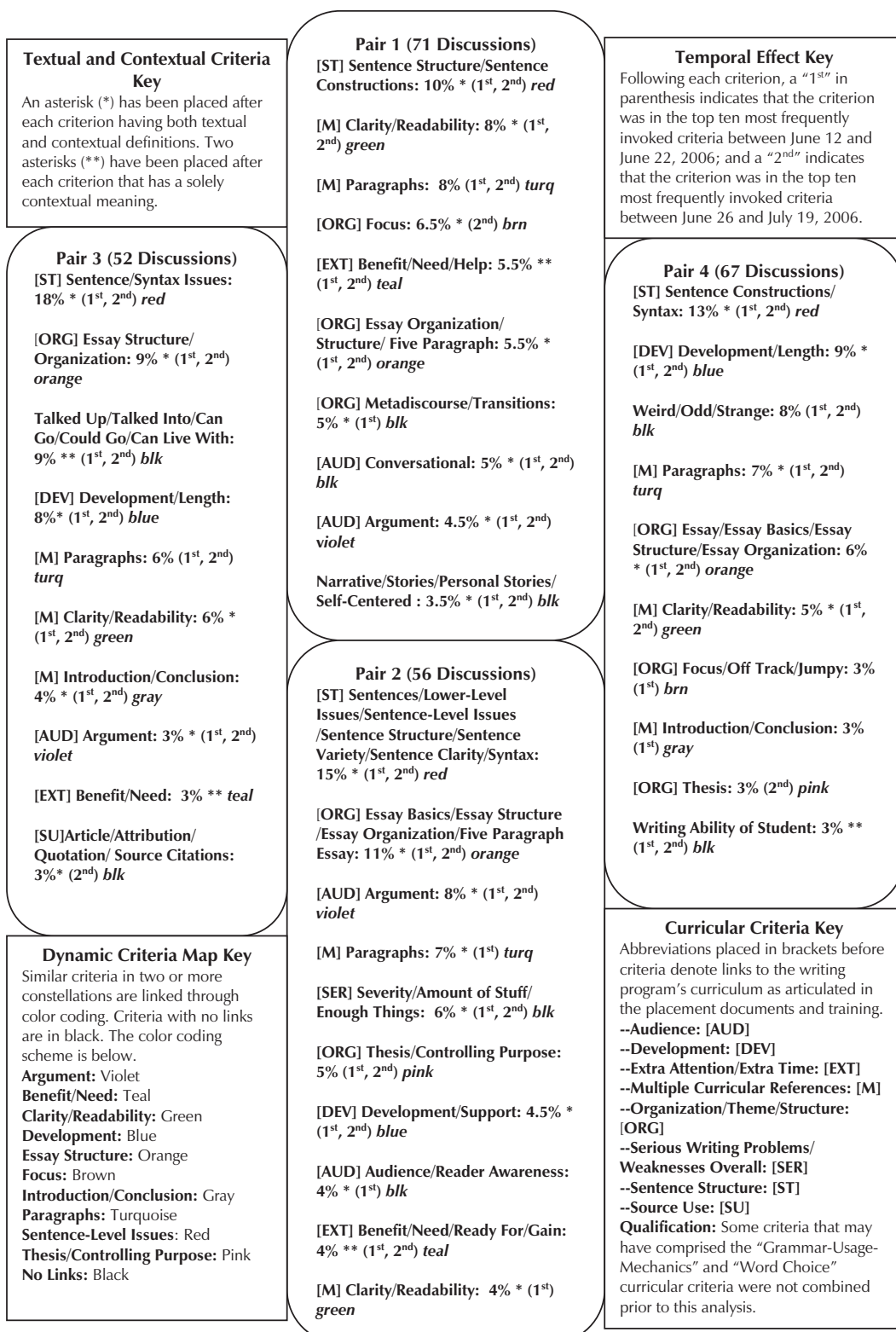


Fig 2. English 111 Dynamic Criteria Map

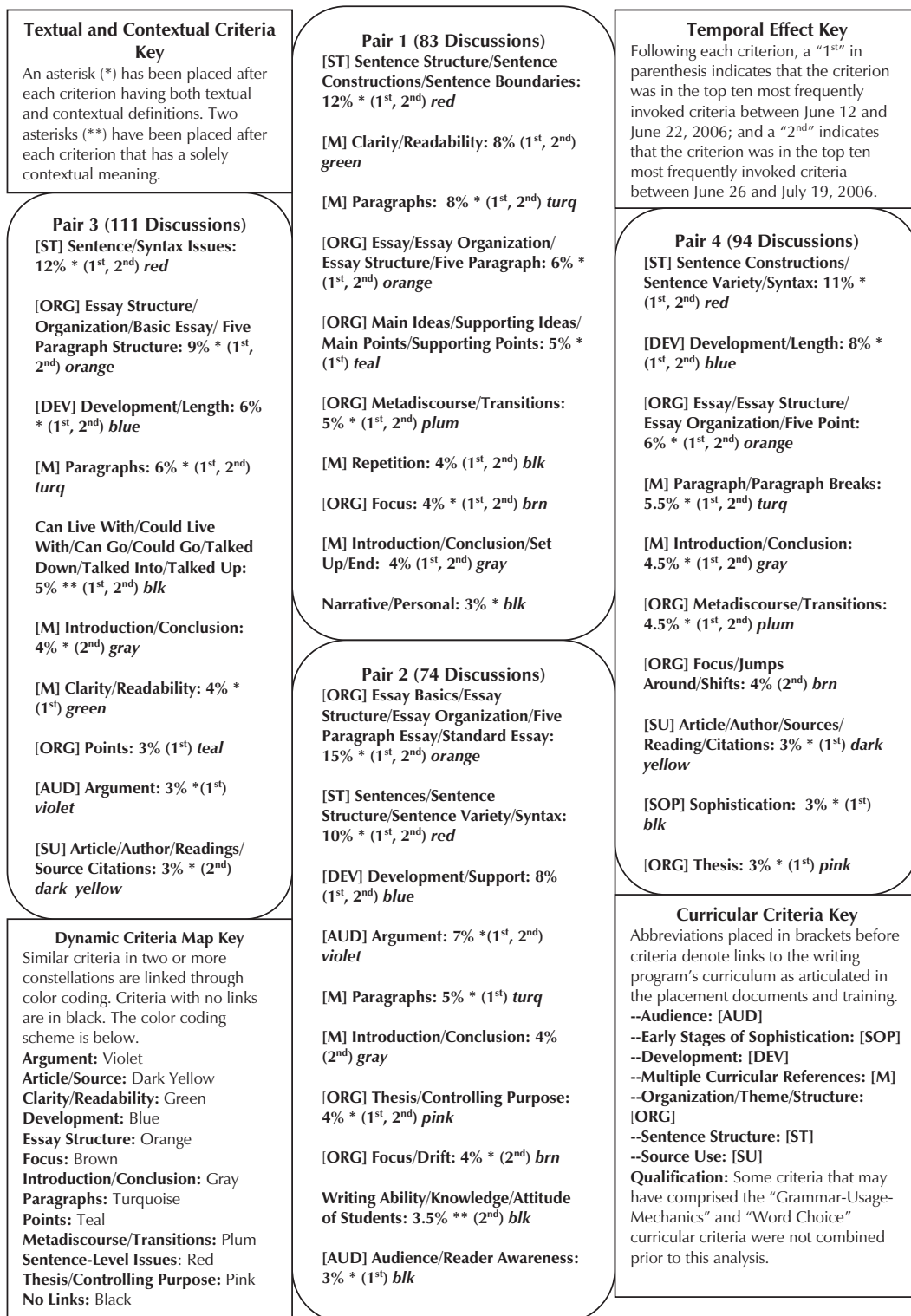


Fig 3. English 112 Dynamic Criteria Map

<p>Textual and Contextual Criteria Key</p> <p>An asterisk (*) has been placed after each criterion having both textual and contextual definitions. Two asterisks (**) have been placed after each criterion that has a solely contextual meaning.</p>	<p>Pair 1 (24 Discussions)</p> <p>[SOP] Good/Strong and Weak/Passive Essay Elements: 15% * (1st, 2nd) <i>dark blue</i></p> <p>[ORG] Metadiscourse/Transitions: 9% * (1st, 2nd) <i>plum</i></p> <p>[ORG] Main Ideas/Supporting Ideas/Main Points/Supporting Points: 8% * (1st, 2nd) <i>teal</i></p> <p>[DEV] Development: 7% * (1st, 2nd) <i>blue</i></p> <p>[M] Paragraphs: 7% * (1st, 2nd) <i>turq</i></p> <p>[ORG] Essay Organization/Structure/Five Paragraph: 5% (2nd) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[M] Introduction/Set Up/Conclusion: 6% * (1st, 2nd) <i>blk</i></p> <p>Benefit/Need/Help/Extra Time: 6%** (1st, 2nd) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[SU] Article Source/Citations/Quotation Integration: 4% * (1st, 2nd) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>Clarity/Readability: 4% (2nd) <i>green</i></p>	<p>Temporal Effect Key</p> <p>Following each criterion, a “1st” in parenthesis indicates that the criterion was in the top ten most frequently invoked criteria between June 12 and June 22, 2006; and a “2nd” indicates that the criterion was in the top ten most frequently invoked criteria between June 26 and July 19, 2006.</p>
<p>Pair 3 (34 Discussions)</p> <p>[ST] Sentence/Syntax Issues: 9% * (1st, 2nd) <i>red</i></p> <p>[ORG] Essay Structure/Organization/Five Paragraph Structure: 9% * (1st, 2nd) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[DEV] Development/Length: 9% * (1st, 2nd) <i>blue</i></p> <p>Can Go/Could Go/Talked Up/Talked Down/Bump It Up: 6% ** (1st, 2nd) <i>indigo</i></p> <p>[ORG] Points/Options: 5% (1st, 2nd) <i>teal</i></p> <p>[WC] Vocabulary: 4.5% * (1st, 2nd) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[SU] Article/Author/Readings/Source Citations: 4% * (1st, 2nd) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>[M] Clarity/Readability: 4% * (1st) <i>green</i></p> <p>[M] Paragraphs: 4% * (2nd) <i>turq</i></p> <p>Weird/Strange/Odd: 3.5% (1st) <i>blk</i></p>	<p>Pair 2 (36 Discussions)</p> <p>[ORG] Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/ Five Paragraph Essay: 11% * (1st, 2nd) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[ORG] Metadiscourse/Transitions: 11% * (1st, 2nd) <i>plum</i></p> <p>Writing Ability/Skill Level/Attitude/Potential of Students: 8% ** <i>brown</i></p> <p>[DEV] Development: 7% * (1st, 2nd) <i>blue</i></p> <p>[SU] Article/Source: 5% * (2nd) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>[CT] Critical Thinking: 4.5% * (2nd) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[ST] Sentences/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 4% * (1st, 2nd) <i>red</i></p> <p>[DEV] Examples/Support/Use of Sources for Support: 4% * <i>blk</i></p> <p>[SOP] Sophistication: 4% * (1st) <i>pink</i></p> <p>[AUD] Argument: 3% * (1st) <i>blk</i></p>	<p>Pair 4 (44 Discussions)</p> <p>[DEV] Development/Length: 11% * (1st, 2nd) <i>blue</i></p> <p>[SOP] Sophistication: 8% * (1st, 2nd) <i>pink</i></p> <p>[SU] Article/ Author/Source/Quotations/References: 7% * (1st, 2nd) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>Writing Ability of Student: 6% ** (1st, 2nd) <i>brown</i></p> <p>[ORG] Metadiscourse/Transitions: 5% * (1st) <i>plum</i></p> <p>Entertaining/Fun/Interesting/Liked: 5% ** (1st, 2nd) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[ORG] Essay/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Point: 5% (1st, 2nd) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[ST] Sentence Constructions/Sentence Variety: 5% * (1st, 2nd) <i>red</i></p> <p>Can/Could Do/Go: 4% ** (1st) <i>indigo</i></p> <p>[SOP] Strong/Solid: 4% (1st) <i>dark blue</i></p>
<p>Dynamic Criteria Map Key</p> <p>Similar criteria in two or more constellations are linked through color coding. Criteria with no links are in black. The color coding scheme is below.</p> <p>Article/Source: Dark Yellow</p> <p>Can Go: Indigo</p> <p>Clarity/Readability: Green</p> <p>Development: Blue</p> <p>Essay Structure: Orange</p> <p>Metadiscourse/Transitions: Plum</p> <p>Paragraphs: Turquoise</p> <p>Points: Teal</p> <p>Sentence-Level Issues: Red</p> <p>Sophistication: Pink</p> <p>Strong/Solid: Dark Blue</p> <p>Writing Ability of Students: Brown</p> <p>No Links: Black</p>	<p>Curricular Criteria Key</p> <p>Abbreviations placed in brackets before criteria denote links to the writing program’s curriculum as articulated in the placement documents and training.</p> <p>--Audience: [AUD]</p> <p>--Critical Thinking: [CT]</p> <p>--Development: [DEV]</p> <p>--Multiple Curricular References: [M]</p> <p>--Organization/Theme/Structure: [ORG]</p> <p>--Sentence Structure: [ST]</p> <p>--Sophistication in One or More Areas: [SOP]</p> <p>--Source Use/Synthesis of Sources:[SU]</p> <p>--Word Choice: [WC]</p> <p>Qualification: Some criteria that may have comprised the “Grammar-Usage-Mechanics” and “Word Choice” curricular criteria were not combined prior to this analysis.</p>	

In order to compare the evaluators’ rhetorical criteria with the placement program’s documented curricular values or criteria, I described how the placement program articulated the curriculum in the official placement training documents and sessions. The General Studies Writing (2006-07) *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook* articulated the entrance-level, exit-level, and course requirements for the program’s writing courses English 110, English 111, and English 112. Likewise, both the training sessions and the handbook described the entrance-level criteria evaluators were trained to use in placing students into the courses.

TABLE: QUANTITATIVE CODEBOOKS OF FREQUENTLY USED CRITERIA

English 110: Ten most-frequently-invoked criteria with respect to English 110 placement decisions

	<i>Pair 1 (71 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 2 (56 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 3 (52 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 4 (67 Discussions)</i>
1	Sentence Structure/ Sentence Constructions: 10%	Sentences/Lower-Level Issues/Sentence- Level Issues/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Sentence Clarity/Syntax: 15%	Sentence/Syntax Issues: 18%	Sentence Constructions/Syntax: 13%
2	Clarity/Readability: 8%	Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Paragraph Essay: 11%	Essay Structure/ Organization: 9%	Development/Length: 9%
3	Paragraphs: 8%	Argument: 8%	Talked Up/Talked Into/ Can Go/Could Go/Can Live With: 9%	Weird/Odd/Strange: 8%
4	Focus: 6.5%	Paragraphs: 7%	Development/Length: 8%	Paragraphs: 7%
5	Benefit/Need/Help: 5.5%	Severity/Amount of Stuff/Enough Things: 6%	Paragraphs: 6%	Essay/Essay Basics/ Essay Structure/Essay Organization: 6%
6	Essay Organization/ Structure/Five Paragraph: 5.5%	Thesis/Controlling Purpose: 5%	Clarity/Readability: 6%	Clarity/Readability: 5%
7	Metadiscourse/ Transitions: 5%	Development/Support: 4.5%	Introduction/ Conclusion: 4%	Focus/Off Track/Jumpy: 3%

8	Conversational: 5%	Audience/Reader Awareness: 4%	Argument: 3%	Introduction/Conclusion: 3%
9	Argument: 4.5%	Benefit/Need/Ready For/Gain: 4%	Benefit/Need: 3%	Thesis: 3%
10	Narrative/Stories/Personal Stories/Self-Centered: 3.5%	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Article/Attribution/Quotation/Source Citations: 3%	Writing Ability of Student: 3%

English 111: Ten most-frequently-invoked criteria with respect to English 111 placement decisions

	<i>Pair 1 (83 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 2 (74 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 3 (111 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 4 (94 Discussions)</i>
1	Sentence Structure/Sentence Constructions/Sentence Boundaries: 12%	Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Paragraph Essay/Standard Essay: 15%	Sentence/Syntax Issues: 12%	Sentence Constructions/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 11%
2	Clarity/Readability: 8%	Sentences/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 10%	Essay Structure/Organization/Basic Essay/Five Paragraph Structure: 9%	Development/Length: 8%
3	Paragraphs: 8%	Development/Support: 8%	Development/Length: 6%	Essay/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Point: 6%
4	Essay/Essay Organization/Essay Structure/Five Paragraph: 6%	Argument: 7%	Paragraphs: 6%	Paragraph/Paragraph Breaks: 5.5%
5	Main Ideas/Supporting Ideas/Main Points/Supporting Points: 5%	Paragraphs: 5%	Can Live With/Could Live With/Can Go/Could Go/Talked Down/Talked Into/Talked Up: 5%	Introduction/Conclusion: 4.5%
6	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 5%	Introduction/Conclusion: 4%	Introduction/Conclusion: 4%	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 4.5%
7	Repetition: 4%	Thesis/Controlling Purpose: 4%	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Focus/Jumps Around/Shifts: 4%
8	Focus: 4%	Focus/Drift: 4%	Points: 3%	Article/Author/Sources/Reading/Citations: 3%
9	Introduction/Conclusion/Set Up/End: 4%	Writing Ability/Knowledge/Attitude of Students: 3.5%	Argument: 3%	Sophistication: 3%
10	Narrative/Personal: 3%	Audience/Reader Awareness: 3%	Article/Author/Readings/Source Citations: 3%	Thesis: 3%

*English 112: Ten most-frequently-invoked criteria with respect to
English 112 placement decisions*

	<i>Pair 1 (24 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 2 (36 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 3 (34 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 4 (44 Discussions)</i>
1	Good/Strong and Weak/Passive Essay Elements: 15%	Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Paragraph Essay: 11%	Sentence/Syntax Issues: 9%	Development/Length: 11%
2	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 9%	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 11%	Essay Structure/Organization/Five Paragraph Structure: 9%	Sophistication: 8%
3	Main Ideas/Supporting Ideas/Main Points/Supporting Points: 8%	Writing Ability/Skill Level/Attitude/Potential of Students: 8%	Development/Length: 9%	Article/Author/Source/Quotations/References: 7%
4	Development: 7%	Development: 7%	Can Go/Could Go/Talked Up/Talked Down/Bump It Up: 6%	Writing Ability of Student: 6%
5	Paragraphs: 7%	Article/Source: 5%	Points/Options: 5%	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 5%
6	Essay Organization/Structure/Five Paragraph: 5%	Critical Thinking: 4.5%	Vocabulary: 4.5%	Entertaining/Fun/Interesting/Liked: 5%
7	Introduction/Set Up/Conclusion: 6%	Sentences/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 4%	Article/Author/Readings/Source Citations: 4%	Essay/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Point: 5%
8	Benefit/Need/Help/Extra Time: 6%	Examples/Support/Use of Sources for Support: 4%	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Sentence Constructions/Sentence Variety: 5%
9	Article Source/Citations/Quotation Integration: 4%	Sophistication: 4%	Paragraphs: 4%	Can/Could Do/Go: 4%
10	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Argument: 3%	Weird/Strange/Odd: 3.5%	Strong/Solid: 4%

The writing program aligned the criteria used in placing essays, grading essays, scoring portfolios, and teaching writing skills in each course; therefore, these criteria represent the program's principal or most emphasized evaluative curricular criteria. The writing program instructed teachers to focus on six core curricular criteria in placing essays, grading essays, teaching writing skills, and scoring portfolios. This alignment is evident in all of the program's manuals, including the *General Studies Writing Program's Placement Evaluators' Handbook* (2006-07), *Instructors' Handbook* (2006-07), and the *General Studies Writing Program Rubric* (2007).

According to the *Placement Evaluators' Handbook*, which the placement coordinator reviewed during the training sessions, placement features emphasized six major categories (7–12):

Audience
Organization/Theme/Structure
Development
Sentence Structure
Word Choice
Grammar-Usage-Mechanics

These criteria correspond with the six principal rubric categories:

Audience
Organization/Theme/Structure
Development
Syntax
Word Choice
Usage/Mechanics

Likewise, according to the handbook, five skills are taught in each course: Audience, Organization/Theme/Structure, Development, Sentence Structure, Word Choice, and Grammar-Usage-Mechanics (2–6). (See Appendix A: Curricular Criteria for curricular criteria definitions.)

In addition to these six criteria, the placement coordinator emphasized additional secondary criteria or “placement indicators” during the training sessions; in other words, secondary criteria did not necessarily determine placements but were additional probable indicators of placement categories. For English 110 placements, the coordinator emphasized the criteria “Serious Writing Problems/Weaknesses Overall,” “Extra Attention/Extra Time,” and “Source Use.” English 110 provides two extra hours for instructors to help students as a class or one-on-one with writing weaknesses, such as grammar, usage, and mechanics errors. English 110 placement essays may also demonstrate severe or pervasive writing weaknesses; the coordinator explained that evaluators must consider the extent of writing weaknesses if they are pervasive in English 110 placements.

With regard to English 111 placements, the coordinator emphasized the criteria “Early Stages of Sophistication,” “Source Use,” and “Critical Thinking.” (“Source Use” was also included as a secondary criterion for English 110 because evaluators used it in making English 110 placements.) English 111 essays may begin to demonstrate sophistication, introduce sources, or reveal critical thinking or depth of analysis. Concerning English 112 placements, the coordinator emphasized the criteria “Counterargument,”

“Sophistication in One or More Areas,” “Source Use/Synthesis of Sources,” and “Critical Thinking.” English 112 placement essays may demonstrate counterarguments, sophistication in one or more criteria, use or synthesis of source material, and/or critical thinking to some degree.

WHAT DID WE REALLY VALUE?

Broad (2008) explained that traditional rubrics tend to present “simple,” “flat,” or “whitewashed” evaluative criteria, so the more complex, multidimensional, descriptive nature of these criteria often go unrepresented in such scoring guides. Broad’s point is that scoring documents, in making evaluations more efficient, gloss over the complexities of the actual assessment process. This study explored a related key issue: how do normative documents correspond to the actual evaluative process? To what extent did the writing program’s carefully-crafted documents and formal training and norming procedures, reflect the nuanced, rhetorical complexities of placement evaluators’ rhetorical values? Most importantly, how can this information be used to strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection?

The fear of whitewashing criteria weighed heavily on our minds at UNR because we did produce a rubric (of sorts). Using overlapping language that had been generated during faculty focus groups and engaging in discussions about how to use, and not use, these descriptors during reader norming sessions played a key role in maintaining the complexities of individual criteria.
Detweiler and McBride

Based upon the study’s findings, placement evaluators’ actual evaluative criteria did reflect the main curricular criteria defined in the placement program’s documents; on the other hand, there were criteria not clearly related to the program documents or curriculum. I am not suggesting, however, that placement evaluators’ use of criteria undefined by these documents—the “unofficial” criteria—are somehow inappropriate. Nor am I implying that the writing program was negligent in failing to anticipate placement evaluators’ use of particular criteria. Rather, these criteria are simply part of an unexplored evaluative terrain, ground that has gone unclaimed by official program documents (i.e., rubrics). There are no bad criteria, just unarticulated ones. My purpose, in the spirit of *What We Really Value* (Broad 2003), was to provide an avenue for rhetorical inquiry, investigation, and conversation that could strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection.

The dynamic criteria maps that grew out of this study captured both official and unofficial rhetorical values or criteria of placement evaluators’

assessment practices. Using the maps, I provided the writing program with four specific questions to strengthen the assessment-curriculum bond. In general, these questions bring attention to assessment dynamics that can potentially strengthen this relationship. For writing program administrators in general, I devised a theoretical heuristic that adapts Broad's streamlined approach—a more expedient DCM approach—based upon the program-specific findings. The heuristic is designed to move administrators' thinking from what Broad (2003) calls the “descriptive” process, or “how they [evaluators] do value students' writing,” to the “normative” process, or “how they [evaluators] should value that writing” (133). DCM can be used to examine and understand placement assessment and to offer what Ruth Ray (1993) coined “local” and “global” contributions: to provide a validation argument to strengthen the writing program's placement assessment practices locally, and to provide a theoretical heuristic for applying this study at other institutions globally.

THE FOCUSED VALIDATION ARGUMENT

I provided the General Studies Writing placement program with four focused validation-argument questions, each of which presents a question for administrators and evaluators to discuss, debate, and ultimately, use to strengthen the relationship between the placement program's communal writing assessment practices and the writing program's curriculum. Broad explained that DCM “uses social and deliberative (in the Aristotelian sense) rhetorical dynamics to bring to light latent rhetorical values and get people to negotiate them collaboratively” which foregrounds a “social-epistemic framework” (2006, personal communication). While it was not possible to bring to light or classify every rhetorical value or criterion in one short-term study, I sought to uncover some evaluative dynamics of placement readers' values or criteria—the evaluative values or criteria used socially, deliberatively, and rhetorically—and to influence these dynamics to better reflect the writing program's curriculum in the future.

Based upon Broad's (2003) streamlined DCM application, I present busy writing program administrators with corresponding heuristics for understanding and strengthening the connection between their placement assessment practices and their writing program's curriculum. However, there are two caveats that writing program administrators must consider before employing any of these strategies. First, Broad explains that while the criteria mapping process is transferable among institutions, a particular dynamic criteria map represents educators' local evaluative deliberations based upon the assessment of local texts; as a result, the dynamic criteria maps in this study cannot be used to study or understand placement readers' evaluative criteria in any other placement context. Second,

because I studied the communal writing assessment practices of placement evaluators, this heuristic can only be applied in placement programs that esteem and implement rhetorical evaluative practices. These heuristics are only useful for placement programs that use rhetorical placement assessment models.

Validation-Argument Question 1: How can placement program training continue to strengthen the explicit connection between the curriculum and the placement readers' evaluative practices?

Evaluators used criteria clearly connected to the curricular values identified in program documents, yet several key criteria used by evaluators, identified in the three dynamic criteria maps, were not documented program criteria. As illustrated in the criteria maps, placement evaluators used the principal criteria "Audience," "Development," "Sentence Structure," all of the secondary criteria, and criteria that invoked multiple references to primary and secondary criteria. Evaluators also used the principal criteria "Grammar-Usage-Mechanics" and "Word Choice," but I did not connect all of the criteria related to grammar, usage, or mechanics issues, such as "Fragments," "Run-Ons," "Spelling," "Capitalization," "Comma Splices," and "Punctuation," before the dynamic criteria mapping process; otherwise, grammar and word choice issues would likely have been included in the criteria maps.

On the other hand, evaluators used criteria that represent the unexplored evaluative terrain—criteria not identified by program documents. In particular, placement readers used contextual criteria that expressed evaluative indecisiveness or uncertainty about their own placement decisions. Pair 3, for example, used the criteria "Talked Up/Talked Into/Can Go/Could Go/Can Live With"; "Can Live With/Could Live With/Can Go/Could Go/Talked Down/Talked Into/Talked Up"; and "Can Go/Could Go/Talked Up/Talked Down/Bump It Up" in English 110, 111, and 112 placement decisions respectively. In general, they expressed reluctance in their placement decisions, a desire to be persuaded into making other placement decisions, and/or a resignation to placement decisions. For instance, Pair 3 made one particular decision collaboratively after one evaluator agreed that he/she "could live with" a 112 placement.

Evaluator 1: I had 111+.

Evaluator 2: I've got a 112 for some reason. I don't know why. Clear focus and strong development.

Evaluator 1: I can get talked up to a 112 because I was really close on this one. I wrote down borderline. This was sophisticated. I was a little concerned about the sentence level. Like, occasionally I would see a

word either that should have been one, like here, split into two. But, like, I could live with a 112-. I could do that.

Evaluator 2: Okay. Sure. Just compare that to the other 111s we have.

Evaluator 1: Yeah. And they weren't bad, so I could do that.

At the heart of these criteria is a dynamic that emphasizes evaluative uncertainty—a dynamic that does not make explicit the connection between evaluative practices and documented curriculum. Evaluators seemed to doubt and question their own judgments or simply expressed the willingness to be persuaded into particular assessments. Placement readers, generally speaking, seemed influenced by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, which are contextual influences.

Placement readers used contextual criteria that expressed general intuitions—immediate, unelaborated insights or perceptions—in making placement decisions but unconnected to program documents. For instance, evaluators said that essays were unusual. Pair 4 used the criterion “Weird/Odd/Strange,” which involved “paragraphs, spelling, theses, introductions, conclusions, punctuation, source use, and/or sentence constructions [that] are weird, odd, and/or strange” in placing essays into English 110. For English 112 decisions, Pair 3 used the criterion “Weird/Strange/Odd,” defined as “essays, paragraphs, and/or comma usage [that] are weird, strange, or odd.” Evaluators also said that they enjoyed or liked placement essays. In English 112 placement decisions, Pair 4 used the criterion “Entertaining/Fun/Interesting/Liked,” when the pair “liked essays and found them to be entertaining, interesting, fun to read, and/or enjoyable.” For instance, both Pair 4 evaluators liked a particular essay and placed it into the highest category.

Evaluator 1 I had a 112.

Evaluator 2: 112.

Evaluator 1: She was good.

Evaluator 2: I liked it.

Evaluators appeared to use these criteria to provide quick impressions of how essays were strange or likeable. Because these criteria were intuitive, spontaneous responses, they were not specific or particularly descriptive. In fact, evaluators seemed to draw upon past experiences reading and evaluating essays. In other words, placement readers may have found essays strange or likeable in relation to latent, subconscious memories of the hundreds, if not thousands, of placement essays they had evaluated.

Validation-Argument Question 1 asks writing program administrators to consider how placement program training can continue to strengthen the explicit connection between the curriculum and assessments. Obviously, the writing program should encourage evaluators to use criteria that are

clearly articulated by placement program documents. What then should be done with criteria that fall outside of the traditional criteria box—criteria that express uncertainty or foreground intuitions? Writing program administrators should discuss them with their colleagues and evaluators. Simply put, the program should find a way to articulate criteria used frequently or consistently in placement decisions to more clearly define and connect them to curricular values. For instance, why exactly did Pair 1’s Evaluator 1 feel that he/she “could live with” placing the essay into English 112? What exactly did Pair 4’s Evaluator 2 “like” about that particular essay that justified a 112 placement after such a brief discussion? These evaluative issues should be articulated using Broad’s (2003) streamlined DCM process.

Validation-Argument Question 2: Since evaluators’ placement criteria fluctuate over time, how can the placement coordinator gauge evaluative dynamics to help readers refocus their evaluative practices on curricular values?

With respect to data analysis, the study sought to determine if each placement evaluator’s ten most frequently-used criteria were invoked in the first and second halves of the placement program with approximately the same frequency. In other words, to what extent did each pair use its ten most frequent criteria during the first and second halves of the placement reading sessions? With respect to each dynamic criteria map, following each individual criterion, a “1st” in parentheses indicates that the criterion was in the ten most-frequently-invoked criteria between June 12 and June 22, 2006; and a “2nd” indicates that the criterion was in the top ten most-frequently-invoked criteria between June 26 and July 19, 2006.

Placement evaluators used some curricular criteria frequently during the first half of the placement program but not during the second half; unfortunately, this study was not able to explain why evaluative shifts happened over time, but they did occur, which provides valuable information. Although the placement program may not have time to identify evaluative shifts using this study’s methods, it should be taken for granted that such changes occur, and administrators could discuss potential changes. The issue of how much emphasis or weight evaluators give particular criteria is a corresponding issue because evaluators emphasized criteria differently in the second half of the placement program. Moreover, how evaluators used criteria concurrently is another evaluative issue because some criteria invoked multiple curricular criteria at the same time in one or both time periods.

Validation-Argument Question 3: How can placement program training recognize and distinguish between textual and contextual evaluative criteria?

With regard to contextual criteria, I found that evaluators employed Broad’s (2003) “constructing writers” contextual criteria; instructors

“inferred, imagined, or simply assumed ‘facts’ about a student-author and her composition processes” (89-90). He explained that textual criteria involve “qualities or features of the text being judged,” but contextual criteria include “issues not directly related to the text being judged” (34). Placement readers expressed how they perceived themselves as evaluators, and they imagined writers’ skills, needs, abilities, and/or attitudes.

This raises some complicated and important issues. How do the structures we set up to learn “what we value” affect the analyses that the “we” in that equation produce? How does what emerges from analyses of “what we value” reflect broader conceptions of best practices that we might hold, and what are the relationships among these qualities that we value and broader ones? *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

The majority of criteria identified in the dynamic criteria maps had both textual and contextual properties. In each dynamic criteria map, an asterisk (*) has been placed after each criterion having both textual and contextual definitions, and two asterisks (**) have been placed after each criterion with a solely contextual meaning. For instance, in making English 110 placement decisions, Pair 1’s most-frequently-invoked criterion—“Sentence Structure/Sentence Constructions”—invoked both textual and contextual meanings. The textual definition of this criterion emphasizes textual properties of the placement essays: “essays contain awkward sentence constructions, sentence boundary errors, lack of sentence variety, choppy sentences, and/or disorganized sentences.” The contextual definition, though, emphasizes the skills writers need to improve regarding this criterion: “writers need work recognizing sentence boundaries and combining sentences.”

In placing essays into English 112, Pair 2 used the criterion “Argument,” which had both textual and contextual meanings. With respect to the textual use of this criterion, “essays contain good, overstated, hidden, strong, subtle, effective, and/or ineffective arguments.” According to the contextual use of this criterion, “the online placement test’s instructions impede writers’ arguments.” In both instances, the textual and contextual definitions contain information about the strengths and/or weaknesses of the criterion “Argument,” which was directly connected to “Audience,” a principal curricular criterion of the writing program. In each placement category, evaluators used some criteria that had both textual and contextual properties; nevertheless, they used other criteria that were purely contextual.

Evaluators used exclusively contextual criteria—criteria that represented an individual or collaborative assessment dynamic beyond essays’ textual

characteristics. Whereas Pair 3's criterion "Talked Up/Talked Into/Can Go/Could Go/Can Live With" discussed earlier focused on inward or intrapersonal evaluative practices, placement readers also used contextual criteria that emphasized their perceptions of student writers' abilities. Pair 2 used the criterion "Writing Ability/Knowledge/Attitude of Students" in English 111 placement decisions and the criterion "Writing Ability/Skill Level/Attitude/Potential of Students" in English 112 placement decisions. In placing essays into English 110, Pair 4 used the criterion "Writing Ability of Student." In general, pairs used this criterion in referring to writers who may have problems or may succeed in courses, writers who may be struggling or may be careless writers, or writers who may be struggling with development and sentence breaks. For this criterion, evaluator pairs perceived students' attitudes and writing abilities. For instance, Pair 2 attributed grammar, usage, and mechanics errors to one student's "laziness," a contextual influence.

Evaluator 1: I mean, were there a lot of grammar, usage, mechanics problems 'cause that didn't stick out as a big problem to me? And I noticed some comma issues.

Evaluator 2: That's the same problem. That's just laziness.

Evaluator 1: Yeah.

For English 110 placement decisions, one exclusively contextual criterion involved the secondary curricular criterion "Extra Attention/Extra Time." Placement program training emphasized this criterion in English 110 placement decisions. It is an exclusively contextual criterion because it focuses on the needs of student writers and the instruction and resources they can obtain. Even though such a judgment is based upon the text, evaluators commented on whether student writers need one-on-one instruction and additional time with an English 110 instructor to improve their writing skills.

Placement evaluators used various criteria related to "Extra Attention/Extra Time." In English 110 placements, Pair 1 used the criterion "Benefit/Need/Help"; Pair 2 used the criterion "Benefit/Need/Ready For/Gain"; and Pair 3 used the criterion "Benefit/Need." Again, this criterion referred to students' need for extra help in English 110 with severe and/or pervasive writing weaknesses. For instance, Pair 2's criterion "Benefit/Need/Ready For/Gain" is defined as the following: "writers would benefit from extra time in English 110, time at the Writing Center and professor's office, time revising, time reading the handbook, and/or time working on sentence level and syntactical concerns." Pair 1 also used the criterion "Benefit/Need/Help/Extra Time" in English 112 placement decisions. According to this criterion, "writers may not benefit much from extra time or need

extra work in English 111.” Overall, for this particular criterion, evaluators reflected on writers’ perceived needs with regard to specific writing classes.

Placement program training should more explicitly focus on the distinction between textual and contextual criteria and how both are related to the curriculum. Broad’s (1997, 2000, 2003) studies and other prominent studies in exit assessment (see Haswell 1998, 2001; Huot 1993) have established that contextual factors, factors outside of the actual text, influence assessment decisions. Even in this study, a study that focused exclusively on placement assessment, evaluators read essays cold—without any prior knowledge of the writers—yet they still used a variety of contextual criteria that invoked images of the writers.

Unfortunately, the contextual nature of evaluative criteria has often been traditionally ignored or deemphasized in training and norming sessions and assessment practices in order to minimize evaluators’ so-called idiosyncratic assessment practices. In other words, contextual criteria—criteria not specifically focused on textual properties—have been seen to interfere with the norming and calibration processes. The idea, however, that evaluators can be trained to focus only on the qualities of a text, and nothing outside of it, is both unrealistic and unsupported by assessment research.

At IUPUI, we realized that contextual criteria are crucial in creating curricular coherence. It’s often the contextual criteria that address the relationships between textual properties and the specific place where writing happens. The EMU experiences, too, build on place-based criteria to promote coherence. DCM encourages participants to confront the relationships between contextual and textual criteria, and that confrontation builds knowledge and confidence. It may not be easy, but it’s worth it. *Harrington and Weeden*

At UNR, we also recognized how assessment participants constructed writers and constructed instructors. The construction of writers and instructors emerged primarily from our focus group participants’ concerns that students were meeting the specific expectations of assignments (and not the course) and their concerns that instructors were not designing their assignments to meet the high end of the assessment ratings. Since ours was a programmatic assessment, we made a non-scored feature—Meets Expectations of the Assignment—to provide a space for portfolio assessment readers to address this concern. *Detweiler and McBride*

Validation-Argument Question 4: How can placement program training further emphasize how to assess the use of narrative and/or personal experiences in support of argumentation?

Placement evaluators discussed students' use of the narrative genre with respect to the writing program's focus on persuasive writing. In English 110 placement decisions, Pair 1 used the criterion "Narrative/Stories/Personal Stories/Self-Centered," which is defined textually as narratives and stories that "are self-centered or focused primarily on the writers' experiences," and "do not support the main idea or point of the essays," and contextually as "writers will need help in English 110 to help them with the narrative." In English 111 placement decisions, Pair 1 used the criterion "Narrative/Personal," defined textually as "essay support is narrative and based upon personal experiences and examples" and contextually as "students will not use narrative in the writing classes because the writing program deemphasizes narrative." In all of these instances, there seemed to be conflicting values, both positive and negative, about the role of narrative writing. The other evaluator pairs used "narrative" criteria to a lesser degree; in addition, the narrative criteria overlapped with various criteria, such as "evidence." In one English 111 placement decision, one Pair 1 evaluator comments that the narrative supports the essay's argument.

Evaluator: I think the structure is fairly decent. He says, "Most college students aren't prepared to budget money smartly." It answers the prompt, deals with some of this, and then he says, "First of all, I can tell most students are prepared." The evidence is narrative, and he needs some more inclusive examples, but even then, his examples are fairly . . . He is not just taking it from one person. They are from his point of view, and they are from his life. But you know, this is three friends of his. We've got another couple of friends. It's narrative certainly, but I don't think it's disorganized.

In placement program training sessions, a continued and more vigorous focus on the appropriate use of narrative should be emphasized. According to the General Studies Writing (2006-07) *Placement Evaluators' Handbook*, "while narrative (storytelling) can be used in an effective argument, an essay that takes an exclusively narrative approach to the topic without taking a clear position and presenting relevant evidence in support of a focused thesis should be placed no higher than English 111 so that the writer may learn the basics of effective academic argument" (11). Even so, "narrative" was not an official placement criterion, and it was discussed as a side issue.

Because of the curricular emphasis on persuasive writing, placement evaluators should be encouraged to assess narrative in support of

argumentation rather than view narrative as a separate genre. Although the narrative genre is not emphasized in the writing program's essay assignments, it is important to have evaluators articulate how narrative elements in support of argumentation should be articulated and valued. In particular, placement administrators should provide more nuanced narrative criteria in discussing how the use of narrative may support argumentation in all three placement categories.

LOCAL (PEDAGOGICAL) AND GLOBAL (THEORETICAL) APPLICATIONS

Writing program administrators are presented with pedagogical applications based upon the findings and observations from this study's validation argument questions. For the local applications, the streamlined DCM application is described with respect to the four validation argument questions. To apply Broad's (2003) application globally, key evaluative issues and sample questions are provided to help writing program administrators conduct his streamlined DCM approach in "articulation" sessions—sessions that work towards normative, evaluative placement practices which emphasize curricular values or criteria. The goal of both the pedagogical and theoretical applications is to move administrators' thinking from what Broad (2003) calls the "descriptive" process, or "how they [evaluators] *do* value students' writing," to the "normative" process, or "how they [evaluators] *should* value that writing" (133). Administrators must reflect on what placement evaluators really value (a descriptive process) before considering what placement evaluators should value (a normative process).

In both the pedagogical and theoretical applications, writing program administrators should use Broad's (2003) streamlined DCM approach for working towards normative, evaluative placement practices that emphasize curricular values or criteria. These activities center on the first five stages of Broad's (2003) streamlined DCM approach—"Selecting Sample Texts" (128-29); "Articulation in Large Groups" (129-30); "Collecting Data for Dynamic Criteria Mapping" (130-31); "Analyzing Data for Dynamic Criteria Mapping" (131-33); and "Debating and Negotiating Evaluative Differences" (133-34)—and these stages are referenced in parenthetical citations. (See Broad's 2003, "Chapter 5: A Model For Dynamic Criteria Mapping of Communal Writing Assessment.")

Because placement essays are archived, the placement program's administrators should select and distribute sample essays to placement readers that would likely recreate evaluations and discussions that foreground the validation-argument questions' evaluative issues. More specifically, the articulation sessions should simulate specific evaluation scenarios. For instance, administrators should select placement essays that may invoke indecisiveness and intuitive criteria (Validation-Argument Question 1);

frequent, infrequent, and multiple criteria over time (Validation-Argument Question 2); contextual criteria that construct writers (Validation-Argument Question 3); and criteria that emphasize the narrative genre (Validation-Argument Question 4).

Placement program administrators and evaluators should gather to discuss placement decisions; they should ask individuals and/or pairs to articulate not only their placement decisions but also their process of making them. (To focus the discussions, administrators should emphasize one validation-argument question at a time.) After the scribes record evaluators' criteria use, administrators and evaluators can discuss, define, and visually connect criteria to determine whether these criteria are connected to curricular values. (For Broad's 2003 approaches, see "Articulation in Large Groups," 129-30; and "Collecting Data for Dynamic Criteria Mapping," 130-31.)

For example, in his own DCM articulation sessions, Broad serves as a collaborative facilitator who helps participants articulate their evaluative criteria about essays. During a workshop at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Broad (2007) conducted a 45-minute DCM streamlined demonstration, which illustrated the "Articulation" and "Collecting Data" stages. He gave approximately twenty workshop participants three sample student essays and instructed them to note the essays' strengths and weaknesses. In order to collect data, a scribe wrote down the criteria educators discussed on a transparency, which was projected onto a large screen. Broad acted as an inquisitive facilitator, asking participants questions about what they valued in the actual texts. To produce an accurate list of rhetorical values or criteria, he asked participants to discuss their criteria, to repeat criteria for clarification, and to find the specific passages in the sample essays to which these criteria referred.

The following theoretical heuristic assumes that placement evaluators at other institutions may use criteria that correspond generally to the validation-argument questions. Writing program administrators should follow the same streamlined DCM approach and facilitate an interactive dialogue with placement evaluators. In the spirit of Broad's (2003) "Debating and Negotiating Evaluative Differences" approach, I identify key theoretical issues with sample questions that writing program administrators can use to frame discussions after evaluating sample placement essays and listing criteria.

Validation-Argument Question 1 Theoretical Issues

How do placement readers use criteria that express evaluative indecisiveness and criteria that express general intuitions, and how can evaluators more clearly use these criteria to strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to address the ambiguity, uncertainty, or intuitiveness of criteria with respect to the curriculum:

- What exactly does the placement criterion [insert placement criterion] express?
- When comparing the placement criterion [insert placement criterion] with the placement criterion [insert a different placement criterion], which criterion is more clearly connected to the writing skill [insert writing skill] taught in the writing class [insert writing class]?
- How does the criterion [insert placement criterion] express uncertainty in placement discussions and/or decisions?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to move collaboratively toward the use of intuitive criteria connected to the curriculum.

- When you said that you [liked or disliked] this essay regarding the criteria [insert placement criterion], what did you mean?
- What exactly did you like and/or dislike about this essay?
- If an essay is [insert intuitive response criterion] what exactly does that mean, and how is it connected to placement, teaching, and/or the curriculum?
- When you said that the sentences were [insert intuitive response criterion], what did you mean, and how is that criterion related to the placement criterion [insert placement criterion]?

Validation-Argument Question 2 Theoretical Issues

How do placement readers weight criteria; how do placement readers use criteria concurrently; and how do placement readers change their evaluative practices over time? Administrators can ask evaluators questions that focus on the frequent, infrequent, or negligible use of criteria with respect to the curriculum.

- Why is the criterion [insert placement criterion] used frequently?
- How is the criterion [insert placement criterion] related to the curricular criterion [insert curricular criterion]?
- Why is the criterion [insert placement criterion] used more frequently than the criterion [insert placement criterion]?
- How does the [frequent or infrequent] use of the criterion [insert placement criterion] compare to the curricular skill [insert

curricular skill] taught in class and emphasized in the writing program's learning outcomes?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to move collaboratively toward the simultaneous use of criteria that strengthen a placement program's assessment-curriculum relationship.

- How does the concurrent use of the criteria [insert placement criteria] reflect curricular values or the skills taught in the writing class [insert writing class]?
- Why are the criteria [insert placement criteria] used simultaneously, and to what curricular values or criteria are they related?
- How does the convergence (or divergence) of the criteria [insert placement criteria] deviate from the skills-oriented criteria [insert skills-oriented criteria] taught in class?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to introduce or reintroduce criteria that invoke curricular values which strengthen a placement program's connection to the curriculum.

- Why was the criterion [insert placement criterion], a criterion that corresponds to a writing skill taught in the writing class [insert the writing class], emphasized more in the time period [insert time period] than in the time period [insert the time period]?
- To what degree do you still use the criterion [insert placement criterion] in placing essays into the placement category [insert placement category]?
- Has the criterion [insert placement criterion] been used more or less frequently in your placement decisions recently? Why?

Validation-Argument Question 3 Theoretical Issues

How do placement evaluators use contextual criteria to construct writers, and how should evaluators employ these criteria to strengthen their relationship with the curriculum? Administrators can ask evaluators how both textual and contextual criteria are connected to curricular values.

- Why does the criterion [insert placement criterion] have both textual and contextual meanings? How are these meanings similar and/or different?

- How is the contextual criterion [insert contextual placement criterion] connected (or not connected) to the curriculum?
- How is the exclusively contextual criterion [insert contextual placement criterion] connected to the curricular criterion [insert curricular criterion]?

Administrators can ask evaluators specific questions about criteria that invoke imagined representations of writers that strengthen a placement program's connection to the curriculum.

- When you speculated that the writer [insert relevant information], what did you mean?
- Why did you speculate that the writer [insert relevant information], and how might this be connected to his/her success in the writing class [insert writing class]?
- How is the writer's perceived ability to [insert relevant information] connected to what the writer will learn in the writing class [insert writing class]?

Validation-Argument Question 4 Theoretical Issues

How do placement evaluators assess the use of narrative, and how should they evaluate narrative and/or personal experiences in support of curricular genres? Administrators can ask evaluators questions about criteria related to the narrative and reflective modes in support of the writing program's curricular genres.

- How does the narrative criterion [insert narrative criterion] relate to the curriculum's focus on the genre(s) [insert rhetorical genre(s)]?
- How much of a factor was the use of the narrative criterion [insert narrative criterion] in placing the essay into the placement category [insert placement category]?
- Explain the use of the narrative criterion [insert narrative criterion] and discuss how its use persuaded/dissuaded you from placing the essay into the placement category [insert placement category]?

CONCLUSION

The placement program's documents and training procedures represent a kind of rubric, albeit an extensive one, because these assessment tools embody what the placement program values about implementing efficient evaluative placement practices. Despite their sophistication, these

assessment tools center on the familiar traditional criteria “Audience,” “Development,” “Word Choice,” “Sentence Structure,” and “Grammar-Usage-Mechanics”; these criteria harken back to Diederich, French, and Carlton’s *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* (1961), an ETS document that Broad (2003) described as “more *scientisic* than scientific” (7). DCM is a research methodology that, as an alternative assessment, seems to contradict such normative scientific assessment tools by describing the untidy, messy nature of the actual placement assessment process. Not only must educators consider this messiness, they must discuss it. However, the DCM process produces documents, too. Harrington (2008) explained that “how documents are framed and circulated depends, in turn, on program leaders’ theories of assessment.” In effect, this study presented an alternative pedagogical and theoretical approach for validating, documenting, and improving placement assessment practices locally and globally.

One inevitable question is how then should rhetorical values or curricular criteria, once they have been discovered and discussed, be defined and articulated? More specifically, how should the DCM documents be used to enhance existing documents and practices? As this collection has demonstrated, a dynamic criteria map is not the end product of all DCM endeavors. DCM is a research method educators employ to design and enhance assessment measures, which may include a dynamic criteria map as an assessment tool, but not necessarily.

DCM may lead writing programs to acknowledge criteria not recognized in documents and assessments historically, such as “Weird/Odd Strange,” “Can/Could Do/Go,” “Writing Ability/Knowledge/Attitude of Students,” and “Narrative/Personal.” If placement evaluators consistently use such criteria to make placement decisions, they should be acknowledged, identified, and defined in program materials and evaluative practices. Broad (2003) argued that “we no longer need to turn away, panic-stricken, from the rich and context-bound truth of how experts really assess writing” (137). In the spirit of locally grown assessments, individual writing programs must decide how to recognize, describe, and document their rhetorical criteria for assessments. What is important is that DCM produces documents and practices, whatever they may be, which best reflect a writing program’s curriculum and actual teaching pedagogies.

So did we really value what we said we really valued? Yes and no. Yes, this study identified clear curriculum-assessment connections. No, some assessment criteria were not clearly connected to the curriculum because they were unarticulated. Nonetheless, DCM can be adapted to uncover and define these assessment-curriculum connections in order to better align a writing program’s assessment and teaching practices. After discussing

rhetorical values or criteria, a writing program can and should bring into line all assessment and curricular practices.

In the case of the General Studies Writing program, the criteria used in placing essays, grading assignments, and scoring portfolios are parallel. Because this study identified criteria not previously defined and documented, I provided the placement program administrators with focused validation-argument questions that can help them discuss how both official and unofficial placement criteria are connected to and differ from criteria used in grading essays, assessing portfolios, and teaching classes. This study, additionally, encourages writing program administrators to employ theoretical strategies to strengthen this assessment-curriculum relationship. Working collaboratively with placement evaluators, administrators can discuss, document, and use criteria that connect a placement program's dynamic evaluative practices with every aspect of the writing program's curriculum.

In Plato's "Phaedrus," Socrates explains that the "dialectic" is the art of discussion or conversation; through question-answer conversations, the participants of the discussion can arrive at probable truths (2001, 164). Socrates asserts that it is difficult to determine whether written information is actually valid, for writing is a kind of "one-way rhetoric" that defies the Platonic "dialectic" because words "say only one and the same thing" (166). In fact, people may believe whatever is written—which has the "appearance of wisdom"—without question (165-66). Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg explain that the "dialectic," on the other hand, is the practice of "inquiry" and "argumentation" through conversation (2001, 1631). Socrates' classical critique of writing illustrates the contemporary limitations of documenting what we think we value and admire about writing and the strengths of Broad's dialectical approach in uncovering, articulating, and discussing what we actually do.

APPENDIX A

Curricular Criteria

ENGLISH 110 PLACEMENTS

Principal Criteria

Audience: no awareness of intended audience; argument and tone issues

Organization/Theme/Structure: no concept of essay structure—introduction, body, and/or conclusion; severe coherence problems

Development: little development of ideas with reasons, illustrations, or specific examples

Sentence Structure: serious sentence problems—3 to 5 fragments or fused sentences in about 400 words; numerous other sentence problems—more than 5 comma splices, unclear sentences, and/or awkward sentences in about 400 words; little or no sentence variety

Word Choice: weak word choice—more than 8 incorrectly used content and/or function words, idiomatic expressions, or unclear referents in about 400 words

Grammar-Usage-Mechanics: weak mechanics/grammar/usage—more than 8 but fewer than 15 different errors in about 400 words

Secondary Criteria

Serious Writing Problems/Weaknesses Overall: pervasive or severe errors or weaknesses are present

Extra Attention/Extra Time: students may benefit from the extra two hours in English 110 to get further help with writing weaknesses, such as grammar, usage, and mechanics issues

Source Use: essays may begin to demonstrate source integration

ENGLISH 111 PLACEMENTS

Principal Criteria

Audience: little awareness of intended audience; lack of credibility in information or argument

Inappropriate tone: illogical shifts in point of view or tense

Organization/Theme/Structure: unclear or unfocused thesis; problems

with coherence; problems expressing ideas clearly and concisely; weak transitions within or between paragraphs

Development: weakly developed introduction and/or conclusion; weakly developed body paragraphs; repetition of thesis in place of specific reasons, examples, or illustrations

Sentence Structure: 1 or 2 ineffective fragments, run-ons, or non-standard structures in about 400 words; 3 or 4 comma splices, awkward sentences, or unclear sentences in about 400 words

Word Choice: 3 to 8 incorrectly used content words, function words, idiomatic expressions, or unclear referents in about 400 words

Grammar-Usage-Mechanics: 5 to 8 different errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics in about 400 words

Secondary Criteria

Early Stages of Sophistication: essays may begin to demonstrate sophistication

Source Use: essays may begin to demonstrate source integration

Critical Thinking: essays may begin to demonstrate critical thinking or depth of analysis

ENGLISH 112 PLACEMENTS

Principal Criteria

Audience: generally effective awareness of the intended readers; some evidence of critical thinking; credible information or argument; appropriate, effective, and consistent tone; consistent and logical point of view and tense

Organization/Theme/Structure: clear, focused thesis; coherence within paragraphs and the essay as a whole; generally effective transitions and metadiscourse; logical essay structure, with an introduction, a body that develops the thesis, and a conclusion

Development: generally well-developed introduction and conclusion; generally well-developed paragraphs, with main ideas supported by appropriate reasons and/or specific examples

Sentence Structure: generally error-free syntax; effective sentence variety

Word Choice: generally accurate, effective word choice

Grammar-Usage-Mechanics: generally error-free grammar, usage, or mechanics

Secondary Criteria

Counterargument: essays may acknowledge opposing or different viewpoints

Sophistication in One or More Areas: essays may demonstrate sophistication in one or more criteria areas

Source Use/Synthesis of Sources: essays may synthesize sources and/or ideas for support

Critical Thinking: essays may demonstrate critical thinking or depth of analysis

7

BOOKEND

Bob Broad

“Grant an idea to be true,” pragmatism says, then ask “what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone’s actual life?”

—William James, *Pragmatism*

Upon re-reading these inter-connected accounts of five adventures in dynamic criteria mapping, I am struck by how greatly these co-authors have enriched the theory and practice that appeared in its infancy in the 2003 book *What We Really Value*. The contributors to this volume have vividly and lovingly illustrated how much more flexible, adaptable, broadly applicable, and variable the DCM process can be than what I earlier did and described. In William James’s words, they have shown what concrete difference DCM makes in people’s actual lives.

The table below represents my synthesis and summary of each of the five projects, including overlapping and harmonizing innovations, discoveries, and benefits achieved in each setting.

Summary of findings for Dynamic Criteria Mapping in Action

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Lead Researcher(s)</i>	<i>Purposes/ Goals for using DCM</i>	<i>Innovations/Discoveries/Benefits of DCM Project</i>
Bowling Green State University (BGSU)	Eric Stalions	General Studies Writing program placement assessment; validate placement process in relation to course content; provide heuristic for placement DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How rhetorical values shape placement decisions• Relationships/connections between placement decisions and the values of the writing program’s documents, procedures, and course curricula• Maps of “unexplored evaluative terrain” where judges use criteria beyond those authorized by program documents• Four-question validation argument (heuristic) by which administrators can strengthen the bond between assessment and curriculum• Positive programmatic and pedagogical value of “evaluative uncertainty”

Eastern Michigan University (EMU)	Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem	First-Year Writing Program, English 121: research, articulate, and share values; boost significance of local place in the teaching and assessing of writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader constituency participating in criteria generation and mapping • Broader audience for results: up & down the institutional hierarchy • Broader application: program assessment and revision • Hybrid criteria map/UnRubric to balance complexity and usability, qualitative and quantitative data • Encountering limits of complexity • Close the loop: transform instruction
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)	Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden	Open up conversations about writing program pedagogy and evaluation; enhance curricular flexibility and coherence; recharge program's "dynamism"; preserve mystery and messiness of learning and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid criteria map/UnRubric (dynamic rubric) to balance complexity and usability, qualitative and quantitative data • Facilitating hard conversations among faculty and administrators • Buy-in by instructors because criteria came from them • Metaphors that lead instructors to "look at the intellectual work" of teaching and learning • Intellectual inquiry into teaching • Qualitative rather than quantitative distinctions among levels of performance
Mid-Michigan Community College (MMCC)	Barry Alford	Assessment across the curriculum: develop a new, "common language of learning and assessment"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community college context: limited resources • Transforming assessment culture from "compliance assessment" to "learning assessment" • New, common language to talk about teaching, learning, and assessment • Facilitating hard conversations among faculty and administrators • Buy-in by instructors because criteria came from them • Close the loop: transform instruction • The power and value of "anti-powerpoint" (recording and projecting participants' statements on a screen for all to see)

University of Nevada, Reno (UNR)	Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride	Core writing program: assess effective writing and critical thinking; provide both qualitative and quantitative data; promote shared reflection on teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader constituency participating in criteria generation and mapping • Broader audience for results: up & down the institutional hierarchy • Broader application: program assessment and revision • Hybrid criteria map/UnRubric (UNR star) to balance complexity and useability, qualitative and quantitative data • Encountering limits of complexity • Buy-in by instructors because criteria came from them • Close the loop: transform instruction • Statistical correlations between/among criteria (rays of the star, spokes of the wheel)
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In *What We Really Value*, (2003) I undertook and advocated for a process (DCM) designed for a specific, focused application: discovering and negotiating the rhetorical values at play in a particular writing program. These co-authors took that process, pushed and stretched it, and applied it to multiple new and different contexts and purposes, including:

- Programmatic assessment and revision
- Teaching, learning, professional development, and building professional community across the curriculum
- Administrative demands for assessments of various kinds
- Placement assessment

But the theme that moves me the most in this book is found not in the explicit lists of bullet points in the lines (or chapters) above, but rather woven subtly throughout this volume. Barry Alford observes that educators are feeling “a real hunger for conversation.” Jane Detweiler and Maureen McBride extol the virtues of “working from within” in exploring what we value in our colleges and universities. Susanmarie Harrington and Scott Weeden insist on getting their instructors to articulate and listen to each other’s diverse approaches to teaching and evaluation. Eric Stalions connects the transformative power of Dynamic Criteria Mapping to Socratic dialectic and its structural privileging of closely connected speaking and listening. And, in what I view as the ideal epigraph for this work, Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem note that “at the heart of DCM is listening.”

What I take away from this cluster of observations is that people value and benefit from DCM chiefly because it restores experiences that are otherwise difficult to come by either in academia or in contemporary society:

feeling heard, listening to others, and believing that your—and others’—words and beliefs will be valued and will make a difference. In other words, the benefits of DCM are the same as the benefits of participative democracy. Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem put it this way in their interchapter comments on the IUPUI chapter:

Bob’s book is called *What We Really Value* . . . in addition to uncovering what “we” (in any context/program) value, this approach privileges a kind of conversation that we in the field of composition and rhetoric also value, a conversation about writing . . . (74)

What the field of rhetoric and composition really values, in other words, is frank, professional, transformative *talk* about writing. DCM makes that talk happen.

These co-authors have made DCM a far better, far stronger idea and practice in this book than it was in *What We Really Value*. They have transformed DCM into something more flexible, adaptable, variable, and useful. For their efforts and accomplishments I am deeply grateful—and excited.



In a presentation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication 2008 in New Orleans, Brian Huot called for governmental regulation of writing assessment (Huot 2008). Based on his careful study of the history, politics, and economics of evaluating writing, Huot concluded that the near-hundred-year effort to create official oversight of the assessment industry should finally yield results.

Not only do I count myself among the admirers and beneficiaries of Brian Huot’s work; I also count myself among those who strongly advocate that government play its crucial appointed role in protecting the common good against the ravages of reckless profiteering and other forms of human depravity. Nevertheless, as I sat and listened to Huot’s compelling case for regulation, I kept finding myself thinking of farmer Joel Salatin and feeling a surprising skepticism toward Huot’s hope that governmental regulation would substantially solve the problems, and minimize the educational damage, wrought by the U.S. testing industry.

Joel Salatin is the organic farmer-philosopher about whom Michael Pollan writes in his book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. In Salatin’s effort to carry out his inspired vision of local, sustainable, healthy, ethical farming on his Polyface Farm in the town of Swoope, Virginia, he has been frustrated at many points by exactly the kind of regulatory agencies for which Huot is calling in the field of writing assessment. Salatin finds that the thinking and the values of the USDA, for example, are completely molded to the interests of industrial agriculture, such that

the USDA ends up supporting the grotesque animal suffering inherent in factory farming and industrial slaughterhouses, while simultaneously interfering with and hindering Salatin's eminently more humane, healthy, and sanitary efforts to raise and slaughter cows, hogs, and chickens.

What Salatin finds is that, over time and under the wrong political conditions, governmental regulatory agencies (think: Environmental Protection Agency or Department of Education) can be and are perverted so that they serve and protect the interests of the very industries they are intended to monitor, while blocking the efforts of inspired and impassioned reformers such as Salatin. Salatin believes that farmers and their customers working together provide a much better form of "regulation" than governmental agencies. If the customers are invited to come to the farm and watch the planting, growing, harvest, slaughter, and other activities, both the farmer and the customers will be better protected than they possibly could be by a regulatory agency.

"You can't regulate integrity," Joel [Salatin] is fond of saying; the only genuine accountability comes from a producer's relationship with his or her customers, and their freedom "to come out to the farm, poke around, sniff around. If after seeing how we do things they want to buy food from us, that should be none of the government's business." Like fresh air and sunshine, Joel believes transparency is a more powerful disinfectant than any regulation or technology. (Pollan 235)

It is on the farm, at the farmer's market, and in the community supported agriculture co-operatives (like those in which Henry Brockman, Joel Salatin, and thousands of other farmers and millions of customers participate) where this self-sponsored "regulation" is most effective.

If Salatin is right about the vagaries of agricultural regulation, educators who care about nurturing healthy cultures of learning and sustainable assessment might neither need nor want a government agency to protect them. If those educators follow the example of this book's co-authors and choose to grow their assessments locally and organically, they can reap the benefits of rigorous, home-grown assessment. In other words, the testing corporations—like the agricultural conglomerates—might not need to be regulated if we resolve to take our business to more responsible, more healthy, and more sustainable providers like the co-authors of this book.

What would our educational system look like if half, or all, of the institutions of higher education undertook Dynamic Criteria Mapping? Conversations among colleagues would provide the best possible professional development and curriculum alignment; students would have better access to the values by which their work will be assessed; administrators would have reliable and meaningful information about the achievement

of student outcomes while also benefitting from assessments that close the loop by transforming instruction and learning.

This is not, ultimately, to argue against Huot's call for regulation of the testing industry, which I agree is long overdue. Instead, I contend that our most powerful solutions may lie in shifting the paradigm for "fixing" educational assessment to professional, locally-grounded, organic projects like those detailed in this book.

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INDEX

- Adler-Kassner, Linda and Heidi Estrem 33
argument 140, 143-144
assessment
 alternative 3, 4, 38, 120, 149
 culture 2, 37
 grounded assessment theory 9, 10, 37,
 42-3, 46, 57-8, 60-1, 125-127
 local 3, 4, 38, 47, 52, 54, 158
 meaningful 15, 23, 46, 50, 123, 158
 programmatic 14-19, 16, 33-34, 37, 45, 48,
 54, 67, 80-81
 quantitative 8, 17, 33, 34, 68, 70, 125, 126,
 155
 story-based 20, 21, 22, 38
- Bawarshi, Anis 18, 24, 27, 34
Boyd, Michael 120-121
Broad, Bob 4, 23, 24, 120-121, 122, 126, 135,
 136, 139, 144, 145
- Charmaz, Kathy 126
contexts
 cultural 3, 40, 50, 138
 and genres 15, 18, 19
 institutional 7, 19, 38, 138
 place 15-23, 27-28, 34, 37-40, 58
- Corbin, Juliet 126
criteria
 textual 126-130, 137, 140, 142-143, 147-
 148
 contextual 126-130, 137-143, 145, 147-148
 community college 4, 37-38, 49-50
 complementarity 50, 120-121
 constructivist theory 121-122, 126
 conversations about student writing 18,
 20-25, 28, 33, 38, 56-58, 70-71, 75,
 79-80, 92-93
 critical thinking 41 (fig. 1), 45, 52-8, 45,
 63, 65 n5, 68-72, 88, 134-135
- de Certeau, Michel 26, 27
Diederich, Paul 149
dynamic criteria mapping (dcm)
 criticism of 5
 concept map 25, 26
 dcm method 10, 19-21, 23, 25, 27-33
 discomfort with 12, 23, 29, 31, 95
 and generative space 23
 maps 41, 83-85, 87-88, 100, 127, 128-130,
 137, 140, 149
 and program assessment 14, 16, 95
 process 18-33, 41-46, 55-64, 84-86 124-135
 and traditional rubrics 5, 10-11, 37, 40,
 60-1
- focus groups 19, 20, 21, 62-4
frames of reference 19, 23, 25, 49
- genre 15-16, 18-19, 95, 143-145, 148
Glaser, Barney 126
grading 63, 75-76, 81-82, 86, 89-91, 93, 95-96,
 115-117, 133, 150
Guba, Egon G., and Yvonna S. Lincoln 2-3, 5
- Harrington, Susanmarie 120, 121
Haswell, Richard 3, 4, 121, 142
Huot, Brian 4, 17, 24, 142, 157, 159
- Lynne, Patricia 23, 26, 2, 121
- Miller, Richard 27
Moss, Pamela 3, 123
- narrative 12, 82, 86-87, 102, 105, 108, 128-
 129, 132, 143-145, 148-149
- O'Neill, Peggy 123
- Palmer, Parker 75
persuasive writing 124, 143, 148
placement 120-127, 131-135
Pollan, Michael 1, 157-158
portfolios 19, 23-24, 27-33, 39, 52-54, 61-63,
 66-72, 82-84
program goals 15, 37, 58, 65, 72
professional development 14, 18, 53
- qualities of good writing 11, 18, 24-26, 30-33,
 49, 52, 59, 61, 72, 93-94
- Ray, Ruth 126
reliability 25, 68, 120
rubrics
 critiques of 4-5, 12, 58, 76-78, 135,
 new approaches to 10, 46, 48, 60-68,
 86-89, 90-92, 95-96, 110-117, 134, 148
 unrubric 11, 89-91, 96
- Smith, Barbara 89
Smith, William 121
Strauss, Anselm 126
stakeholders
 campus-wide communities 24, 76
 competing voices of 23

- directors, deans, and other administrators 12, 15, 33
- outsiders 3, 17
- student services personnel 18, 20,
- staff 18, 19, 119
- validity 5, 17, 25, 50, 120, 122-123, 136-139, 143-150
- writing assignments 123, 142, 144
- values
 - faculty 37, 39, 45-47, 50, 72, 80-81, 93, 96
 - language 87, 88, 89, 143-149
 - program 16-17, 22, 58-64, 85, 87, 89, 94, 122-127, 135-137
 - reconciling 24-28, 41-42, 62-64, 87-92
- White, Edward 122

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ORGANIC WRITING ASSESSMENT

Educators strive to create “assessment cultures” (Huot 2002) in which they integrate evaluation into teaching and learning and match assessment methods with best instructional practices. But how do teachers and administrators discover and negotiate the values that underlie their evaluations? Bob Broad’s 2003 volume, *What We Really Value* introduced dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) as a method for eliciting locally-informed, context-sensitive criteria for writing assessments. The impact of DCM on assessment practice is just beginning to emerge as more and more departments and programs adopt, adapt, or experiment with DCM approaches.

For the authors of *Organic Writing Assessment*, the DCM experience provided not only an authentic assessment of their own program, but a nuanced language through which they can converse in the always vexing, potentially divisive realm of assessment theory and practice. Of equal interest are the adaptations these writers invented for Broad’s original process, to make DCM more responsive to local needs and exigencies.

Organic Writing Assessment represents an important step in the evolution of writing assessment in higher education. This volume documents the second generation in an assessment model that is regarded as scrupulously consistent with current theory; it shows DCM’s flexibility and presents an informed discussion of its limits and its potentials.

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