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

Institution	Lead Researcher(s)	Purposes/ Goals for using DCM	Innovations/Discoveries/Benefits of DCM Project
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	• 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	• Broader consituency 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	• 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"	• 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	• Broader consituency 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)

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.