

Training Writing Teachers: An Assignment in Mapping Writing Program Values

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Abstract: Drawing on the work of Broad (2003), I created a Value Mapping assignment that asked graduate TAs in a composition practicum course to map the values of their assigned teaching mentors. Through analysis of syllabi, assignments, grading, and personal interviews, TAs made visual maps of their assigned mentors' teaching values and shared them with the class. Together, they discovered not only the values of the first-year writing program but also how teaching materials convey those values to students. This assignment may be adapted to other types of courses to help students see the different values that underlie their majors or professions.

As Hall and Dueck (2017) acknowledged in the introduction to this journal, assignment creation is intellectual work. Yet my previous research on graduate teaching assistants (TAs) showed that new teachers have difficulty seeing it as such, particularly when introduced to it as a part of a graded teaching practicum where they want to receive a good grade on the teaching materials they create (Grouling, 2015). The assignment discussed in the current article represents an extension of this previous research on practicum courses. In order to engage TAs with teaching materials as rhetorical documents infused with both individual teacher values and with the values of the writing program, I inserted a research assignment into the practicum class that asked TAs to study course documents: assignments, syllabi, and grading sheets. TAs coded their assigned mentors' teaching materials, interviewed their mentors, and mapped their mentors' values. Although Broad (2003) explained that we might not always know what we value explicitly, values are implicitly communicated to others through our language on documents such as rubrics. Although my focus was on graduate students preparing to be teachers, I believe this same method could be applied in either first-year writing or advanced writing courses

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that want to highlight disciplines as “ways of knowing and doing” (Carter, 2007) rather than as static bodies of knowledge.

This assignment was inspired by Broad’s (2003) book *What We Really Value*, in which he described the process of “Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM)” to uncover teachers’ values. I initially called this assignment the *Dynamic Criteria Map* assignment. Unfortunately, that terminology proved confusing for students, so I revised the assignment to simply be called the Value Mapping Assignment. Nevertheless, it is important to understand DCM as an inspiration for this prompt. To uncover writing program values, Broad (2003) suggested teachers meet together and debate student artifacts in an “articulation session” (p. 133). In his example, faculty discussed the quality of student portfolios in a discussion that he later analyzed to produce a Dynamic Criteria Map (DCM). His DCM included one map of textual and one of contextual qualities that teachers valued. For example, his map of the textual qualities consists of multiple circles with headings such as “Ethos” or “Aesthetics” and boxes within each circle for further clarification—the Ethos circle has a box for “Sincerity, Honesty, Innocence” showing the particular type of ethos teachers wanted to see students present (Broad, 2003, p. 39). Other scholars have created different types of DCMs, such as Detweiler and McBride’s (2009) nine-pointed star where each point represents a quality of the text, such as “global issues” and “rhetorical awareness” (p. 65). The form of the map itself is flexible, but it is accompanied by materials that provide context (Broad, 2003, p. 134). While programmatic assessment is the focus of Broad’s book (2003), at the end there is a section called “Classroom DCM” in which Broad mentions having students in our classes “gather data (handouts, responses on writing, comments made in class) that answer the question: ‘what does this instructor... value in your work?’” (p. 136). I immediately wondered how this practice could be adapted to benefit TAs and their understanding of teaching composition.

At my university, TAs in their first semester work in a mentor’s first-year writing classroom while taking a practicum course. To uncover the values expressed in teaching materials by these experienced mentors and compare these to the writing program as a whole, I asked TAs to analyze their mentors’ teaching materials and interview their mentors. The TAs both uncovered implicit values in teaching materials and explicit values in the interviews. My class started with broad definition of values, which included not only qualities that teachers wanted from writing, but also qualities they wanted from students (e.g. promptness), and course content they valued (e.g. multimodality). From their research, TAs created a visual map of teaching values accompanied by a written introduction. My assignment breaks from Broad’s method by focusing on teaching documents rather than discussions among faculty, yet the underlying purpose was the same: to help uncover teaching values that might not be readily apparent. Most importantly, TAs thought about the way values are reified in teaching documents before creating their own teaching materials. The maps were shared in class to see what the writing program as a whole valued. My hope was that new TAs could have a more explicit understanding of both the ways that individuals in the writing program expressed different values and the ways that those values connected instructors across the program.

Mapping Values in TA Preparation

Teacher preparation in composition has long been concerned with teaching values, and my assignment is not the first to ask TAs to view teaching materials as intellectual work. Ryan and Graban (2009) stressed that TAs should see syllabi and assignment sheets as spaces for negotiation of writing program and TA values (p. W291). Popham, Neal, Schendel, and Huot (2002) asked TAs to look at textbooks for underlying beliefs and assumptions and apply them to assignment sheets (p. 26). Similarly, my mapping assignment was designed to help TAs make explicit the values of the writing program and apply them to assignment design. I share Ryan and Graban's interest in seeing teaching documents as spaces of negotiation: I neither wanted TAs to use existing assignments verbatim nor to create something new that did not fit with the program's goals. Thus, it was important for TAs to both complete this assignment and to share it with each other to gain perspectives beyond their own mentors' classrooms. In this section, I describe the details of the assignment that I designed and present examples of practicum students' work (with IRB approval).

This assignment involved five steps: collecting documents from a mentor's course, analyzing the documents, interviewing the mentor, creating a map of instructor values, and sharing with the class. I gave students over a month to complete it. In drafting the assignment prompt, I drew on the language from Broad's book but adapted it to the particular circumstances of the course. My explanation of DCM on the assignment prompt was supplemented in class by including a reading from Broad's book and discussing his maps in class. I asked students to gather several syllabi, assignment sheets, and graded papers (with criteria/comments) from their mentors and to conduct an interview with their mentor. In revising this assignment, I made it clear that the interview should happen after the initial analysis of the teaching materials. In this way, the interview served as a point where the TA could ask questions about the materials and compare what they found with the values stated directly by the mentor. The interview was also transcribed and coded by the TA before mapping. Someone teaching this assignment in another course could cut the interviews altogether for a shorter assignment that focused only on teaching documents.

Each of these steps involved training in class. Once the students had collected their artifacts, we had a workshop on values coding. Values coding typically records values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña, 2012, p. 110). In particular, my class focused on values, defined as "the importance we attribute to... an idea," rather than attitudes and beliefs (Saldaña, 2012, p. 111). For example, consider the following paragraph from a proposal assignment gathered by one of the TAs:

This draft will demonstrate the research you have conducted to understand the injustice and its impact on the campus, as well as what's been done/not done about it (assessment of current efforts).

The following value codes might result from looking at this passage: research, social

justice, campus, and assessment of solutions. Taken on their own, these codes are descriptive; however, if any code appears multiple times, then a theme emerges. For example, if social justice is a theme that reoccurs throughout the course's assignments, then it can be seen as a value of this instructor. The introduction to the map is used to connect and evaluate these values. For example, the mapmaker could comment in the introduction about the connection between research and social justice in the assignments that were coded.

Working from Broad, I initially left the visual design part of the assignment open-ended, and the end products varied significantly. However, I discovered that not all maps were equally successful, and in my current section of the course, I have included more discussion and reading about visually representing data. I added Chapter 10 from the popular textbook *White Space is Not Your Enemy*, which includes information about different infographics and how to avoid misrepresenting data (Hagen & Golombisky, 2017). TAs in our program are expected to teach multimodal assignments; thus, a secondary purpose of the visual map was to teach this skill.

Students' final maps were different types of infographics, including charts, tables, mind maps, and word maps (see figures 1-3). Some students presented one infographic to represent all their mentors' values, while others broke their projects into multiple graphics. As an example, my own TA coded my assignments and presented an infographic that broke my values into five main areas: students' learning, the writing process, good writing, using sources, and rhetorical situation. Under each of these headings, there were codes represented by the frequency of their appearance.

The following examples show approaches taken by different students, some of which were more successful than others.

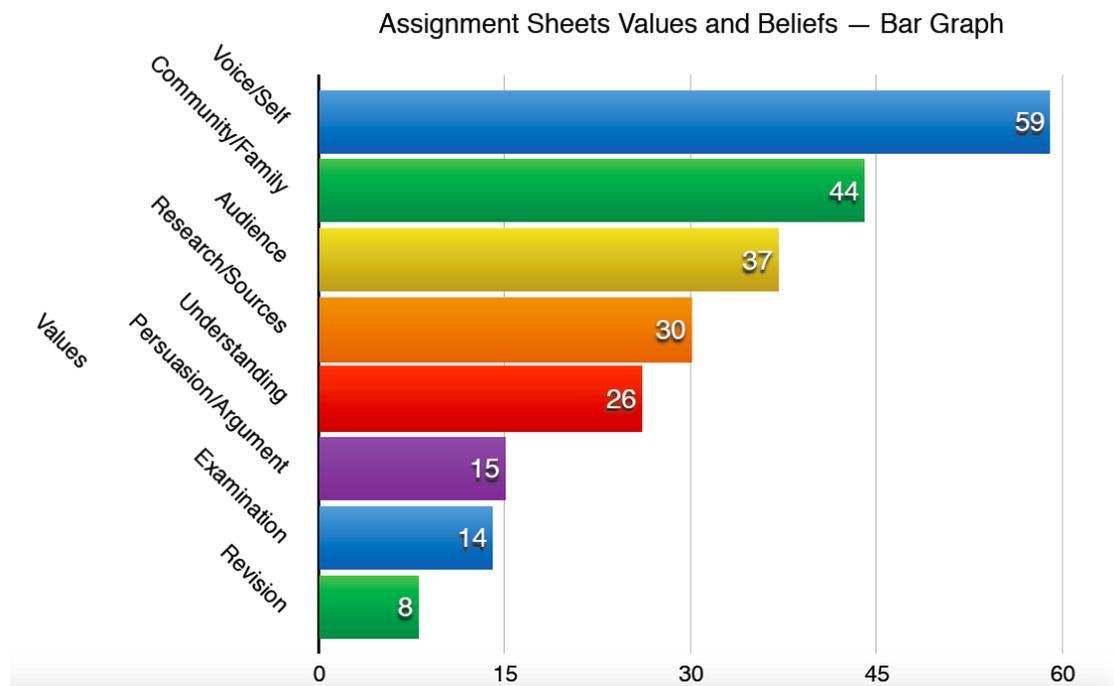


Figure 2: Bar graph by TA to represent mentor's values as reflected in assignment sheets.

The bar graph presented by a different student does indicate more clearly the frequency of the different codes; however, like the word map, it also lumps everything together under values. In this method, it is unclear if community/family is something that students are writing about or if it is valued in terms of creating a community atmosphere in the classroom itself.

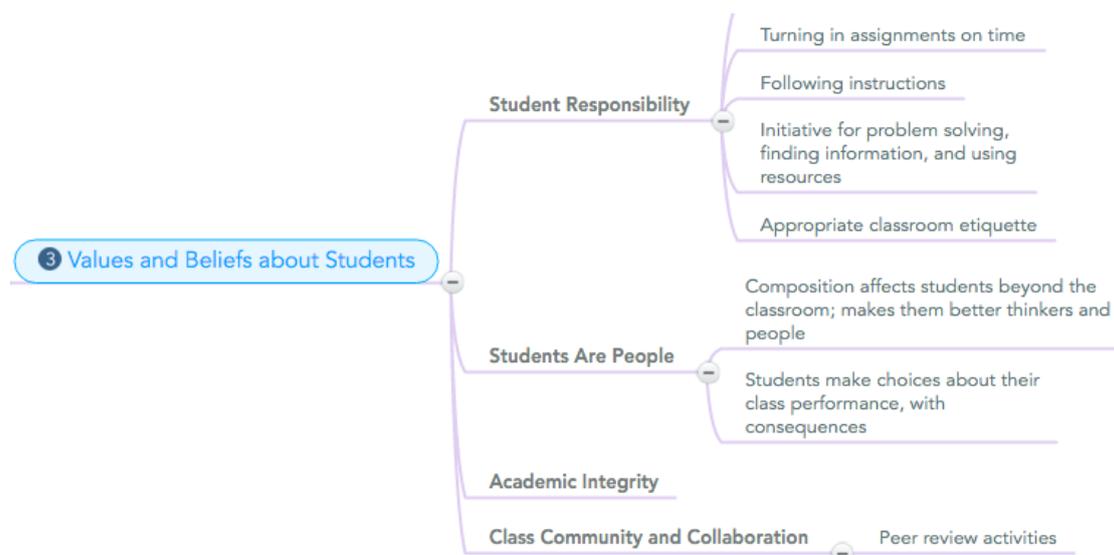


Figure 3: Portion of one of three sections in a TA’s flow chart to represent mentor’s values.

Although less colorful, a flow chart enabled another TA to meaningfully categorize values and show how those values were supported by particular beliefs and classroom practices. For example, in the section on “Values and Beliefs about Students” we know that community is about students and that it is achieved through peer review. The other sections were “Values about Writing” and “Values about Teaching.” Overall, it was the most detailed and successful project because the map was able to convey some of the meaning, not just the frequency of the codes.

In class, I had students compare their maps. In a full class discussion, we listed out the most common values on the board and tallied up how many TAs had also found that value. I then asked students to take any that tallied five or higher, break into small groups and make a second map that represented the larger values of the writing program as a whole. These maps looked like the maps made by individual TAs but were created collaboratively to help TAs identify which values might be idiosyncratic to their mentors and which values were of greater significance to a number of faculty in the program. As Broad (2003) noted, frequency itself does not necessarily equate to significance, but it does provide useful information for comparing criteria (p. 37). First-year students may take repeated terms for key concepts when reading assignment sheets; therefore, I found the discussion of frequency to be a useful starting place for discussing values in course materials. TAs discussed whether or not the values that came up most frequently were, indeed, the values they saw in the overall classroom they were observing.

Connections to the Writing Program

This biggest success I found was that the assignment allowed our conversation about values to be grounded in our own empirical research. I pondered having a set of pre-generated codes taken from the writing program materials or threshold concepts in the field. However, in keeping with Broad's philosophy of DCM, I felt that it was important for the codes to emerge organically from the TAs' interpretations in order to uncover values that might appear in teaching materials unintentionally. This project was also potentially useful for the writing program and the mentors. For example, multimodality is required in our first-year writing courses, yet TAs rarely mapped it as a value in their mentors' teaching materials, which could indicate that it is not being well-used in actual courses. Also, community was a value that many TAs identified, yet it does not come up in programmatic materials. This activity could lead to a discussion of whether or not that value should be focused on more by the writing program.

Although I saw these connections on a programmatic level, TAs found the assignment more valuable for learning specifically about their mentors than for identifying the values of the writing program as a whole. Thus, the initial assignment did not successfully move TAs from viewing values as idiosyncratic to programmatic. In revising the assignment for the current iteration, I added more focus on the writing program. I added an in-class lesson to practice value coding using the writing program course goals and evaluation criteria. I also added more time to compare maps. In the first iteration, class participation and dynamics played a role in our discussion of values as students raised their hands for values that did not actually appear on their maps and did not always volunteer values they had mapped. My hope is that by adding more time for comparison of maps before the full class discussion this issue will be mitigated. A shy student may be more likely to volunteer when small group comparison has already occurred. In addition, we will return to the codes from our practice exercise to compare writing program values and discuss how the mentors are both working within program values and stressing their own unique pedagogies. I revised the assignment so that the introductions for the maps would be due after this discussion; thus, TAs could comment on these connections more clearly in those introductions.

Other Applications

This process can be adapted to multiple writing classes at different levels and disciplines. Students studying a potential major in a first-year writing course could gather assignments from major classes, code them, and interview their advisors about what is valued in the major. Often students view their teachers' grading as idiosyncratic, but if they are able to see how a range of assignments across a major express certain values, they may get a sense of what is valued in that discipline as a whole. This assignment would fit with an approach to composition that stresses writing in the disciplines or writing about writing. It will teach students to read documents rhetorically, pay attention to the ways that

language expresses values, and represent data in a visual form. An upper-level course in writing in a specific discipline might ask students to code documents by a professional organization related to their major to uncover the values of the field.

This assignment could also be paired with other writing projects. For example, in a sophomore introduction to the rhetoric and writing major, I have students do a genre analysis assignment in which students interview someone about writing in their career and collect documents written in their job. Looking at the values reflected in these documents could help students learn how genres reflect values of a profession or the specific company. Students are not always aware of the way values are represented in their day-to-day writing, such as assignment sheets or professional writing. The mapping values assignment brings these values to the fore for more conscious reading and writing.

Seeing writing, of any kind, as conveying values can help students move beyond a view of writing as the neutral representation of information and toward a rhetorical view of writing to which they can add their own voices. Broad (2003) explained, “DCM reveals and highlights the complex, conflicted, communal quilt of rhetorical values” (p. 120). For TAs in a practicum course, it is important to see how individual teachers add their own squares to a quilt made up of writing program values so that they, too, can become intellectually engaged assignment writers.

Assignment–Dynamic Criteria Map

*Revised version to reflect changes discussed in article

See the Supplementary Files for this article at thepromptjournal.com for a PDF facsimile of the original formatting of this assignment.

Overview

Dynamic criteria mapping is a method to discover what a particular writing program values. In our case, it involves collecting data from instructors in the program, coding that data, and then developing a map of what is valued. You’ll be making a map about your mentor and comparing it to the ones made by other students in our class to get a feel for the writing program as a whole.

Parts of the Assignment

Data Collection

For this project, you will collect multiple types of data from your mentor.

- Syllabi for two first-year writing courses (Do not code generic program policies)
- Assignment sheets for the above (Coded)
- Copy of one set of graded papers (with comments/grades. Code only end comments)
- Any rubrics or additional materials related to the graded assignment (Coded)
- An interview with your mentor (to be completed after materials have been coded, transcribe and code it as well.)

Coding

After you collect all of the teaching materials, you'll code them using **values** coding. This is a coding method that looks specifically for the values and beliefs mentioned by participants or implied in their work. Think about different types of values such as what your mentor values in student writing, in student behavior, or in course content. We'll look at examples of this in class and practice it, so you can get a sense of how to complete the coding before you begin. Also refer to our reading on value coding from Saldaña. After you have coded the teaching materials, you will complete the interview, transcribe, and code it as well. Although those codes will be combined with the codes from the teaching materials, it is important to pay attention to how they may vary for writing your introduction.

After you have coded all of your data, you will look how often each code appears. Codes that only appear once are likely not important. However, if you see a code repeated multiple times in different types of materials, it is likely a value of that instructor. For example, if you see "audience" repeated in assignment prompts, as a topic on the syllabus/schedule, and in the grading criteria for assignments, this is probably a concept that your mentor values. Count how many times codes appear.

Mapping

Your final product will represent these re-occurring codes visually in your **Values Map**. Your map will be an infographic of your choice. You might consider dividing the infographic into categories such as: textual values, contextual values, values about students, etc. See what you think works well for the codes you have found repeatedly. Your map should also give some indication of how often a value has come up. Values that are *never* repeated may not make it to your final map. Your map will visually show which values are more frequent (and thus likely more important) than others. Refer to our readings about infographics as you decide the final form to use in representing your data.

Introduction

Accompanying your final map, you will have a **3-4 page** introduction. This will be completed after we share our maps in class. Your introduction will give a **narrative** profile of this particular instructor, their course, and what they value. It will put the map in context. How long has this instructor been teaching? How long at this institution? How does what you observed in their class inform what you found in your research? In addition, your introduction will contextualize your mentor's teaching within the writing program. What values do you see as idiosyncratic to your mentor and what values fit with the writing program as a whole? How do the materials you analyzed compare to the direct values expressed in the interview? Finally, briefly discuss why you chose the format for your map that you did and why you feel this visual best represents the data.

Submission/Grading

You will hand in your coding, your map, and your introduction on Blackboard. You should also bring your completed map to class the day before they are due for discussion.

You'll be graded on how easy to read and understand your map is as well as how specific and accurate it is based on your coding. You'll also be graded on how thoughtful your introduction is, including how much context it gives for the map, and how well it explains your mentor and their values in relationship to the larger writing program. Be professional in your analysis and think through what different values mean, what it means when they conflict, and how it all fits with the larger values of the writing program.

Ultimately, this assignment is less about the final product and more about the research process. As such, I will be taking a look at your interview and coding materials as well. Be sure you are coding effectively and keeping a record of all the different codes you come up with and how many times each appears. Also, be sure to ask thoughtful interview questions and do accurately transcribe the interview.

Note: If you share a mentor with someone else in the class, you may collaborate on the collecting of materials but not on the coding of materials or writing of the assignment. This means that you may do an interview together, but you should each come prepared with your own questions and you should transcribe and code it separately.

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