This is a transcript of the video clip "Selfe Interview: Part 3" from the interview with Dr. Cynthia Selfe in Samuel Head, "A Scholarly Legacy: Professor Cynthia Selfe and the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives" published in *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, *22*(1), available at http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/22.1/interviews/head.

Sam:
What a rhetorical significance do you feel the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives has made?

Dr. Selfe:
I'm not sure this is a rhetorical difference, I can tell you what I'm proudest of about the DALN and what I think it's a accomplished within our field. I think we now have, as a profession, a common corpus of literacy narratives that anybody can study, and that everybody can study, and that we can come at from so many different angles. Because those stories are there, and they're recorded for history, and they're preserved and they're available to people who want to use those or to contribute to the to the collection. And that, in itself, is an important professional contribution, I think. I'm very proud of that particular contribution.

But even more important, I think it gives the profession an understanding of what can happen when you take on these big humanities projects, where the effort of creating them, and the burden of creating the project, not just the money, but the effort of maintaining it and creating it and contributing to it and then using it is shared by many people in the profession. And it shows what we can do when we put our heads together in a collective effort to create something that everybody can benefit from if they have a connection to the internet. And to me, that's a tremendous lesson, and I'm not sure that people really understand the importance of that lesson. I think people like Sandra Pearl understand. She was -- after we started the DALN, for instance, the Writing Tree project that she started was also a crowdsourced project. And she came to me and asked what had we learned from doing the DALN that would translate into success for their Writing Tree. And I think she understood the importance of that model of big humanities, what can we do together, collectively, that the whole profession can benefit from. And I think that people at the 4Cs, especially I might say the staff members of 4Cs, the people like Jackie Biddles, who were conference organizers, or Eileen Maley, who have always made a place for the DALN, because they understand that that historical record that we're sedimented right now will be available for study and years to come. And I think that is key, I think it's absolutely key. If we don't do it, who is going to do it? And if we don't do it now, when are we ever going to start an effort like that?

So I guess the last thing that I'm happiest about is that somebody like Ben McCorkle and Michael Harker, Ben at Ohio State Mansfield and -- I'm sorry Ohio State Marion and Michael Harker at Georgia State, will be the new directors of the DALN and take that forward in time. So that the effort goes on because we never know who's going to use those archives -- these archives -- who's going to use it in the future, what benefit it's going to bring, what contributions it can make. And I think that that -- I think carrying forward it's going to become increasingly valuable

Sam:
So do you have any stories about experiences where you see the DALN has made an impact?

Dr. Selfe:

Yeah I have a story of the class I'm teaching this term that you're in, because every time we teach the Literacy Narratives of Black Columbus class here at Ohio State, what we do is get undergraduate students, graduate students, and community members together on teams. And they go into black Columbus communities, and they provide an opportunity for citizens to tell stories about their literacy, and how literacy has impacted their life, and how their lives have impacted their literacy skills and understandings and values.

And the teams get to choose an area of interest. We've done black churches in Columbus, and it's given congregations and pastors and citizens, individual citizens, an opportunity to think about how the black church has encouraged, sustained, and supported literacy in the United States going forward in history. That's a big opportunity, and I think it makes a big change in the lives of individuals to understand just those connections. In the class that we're teaching right now, for instance, we have a team going out to the LGBTQ community, and providing an opportunity for citizens to tell their stories about literacy and sexual orientation, the intersection of those formations. And we have your team going out into the Somali community and talking to Somali immigrants about how literacy and the challenges of acquiring literacy and a new language, a new culture, a new environment has shaped their lives and their understandings and their values over time from generation to generation, and within the very complex context of a brand new cultural setting at a time in history when they have experienced all the turmoil and violence of a war in their homeland, bringing that experience to the United States.

We can learn a lot from that experience, and so I think that makes a big difference too, just providing people the opportunity to tell their stories, and to tell a story that might run counter to some of the more accepted narratives that we get through the media. These are individual people's experiences and values, and sometimes they adhere to the larger stores and sometimes they depart from it, but they always are instructive in so many ways.

Sam:

So what are some of the directions the DALN has gone? Did it go into directions you thought it would go? Has there been any surprises? And where do you feel like it will be headed?

Dr. Selfe:

Well one of the surprises with the DALN, and I thought when we started it, when Louis and I were working on it's logical structure, I thought that the best way would be to make a structure that asked the same questions of everybody and gave them a controlled vocabulary for responding. So I would ask things like "What state do you live in?" and then I'd give 50 or so opportunities, and they'd have to choose, you know, Alaska, Nebraska, Ohio, whatever. Louis, however, in all his brilliance talked us, talked me into thinking about this is a folksonomy, that is, you might ask the question but there was no controlled vocabulary for responding. So if I would

were to ask something like "what is your sexual orientation?" or "would you like to self-identify with regard to your sexual orientation?" If I had forced choice it would have been days straight, you know, maybe I'd have two or three different choices. But with a folksonomy individuals put in their own identifying term, and because they use their own identifying term, and because they are located in time and space, the terms that they choose also become data for anybody thinking about how to look at the narratives and the literacies that happen. For example, if we'd had a controlled vocabulary, we might have chosen to a question like "what is your race?" we might have had "African-American," "Caucasian," you know, four or five different selections. But because we opened it up to people's own description we find out that some generations preferred to talk -- to use the term "African-Americans," some generations and some people "blacks," some generations and people "African oriented," you know, there are, there might be 20 terms for race in the DALN. It might be 20 terms for sexual orientation in the DALN, and all of those terms, all of those choices provide us data about how people self-identify and then carry that self-identification into some connection with literacy.