

This is a transcript of the video clip "Selfe Interview: Part 5" 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 pedagogical implications do you feel the DALN has?

Dr. Selfe:

Well that the whole object of the DALN is to be a resource that can be used in multitudinous ways by different teachers, in different classes, for different purposes. So, there's no one set of pedagogical outcomes for the DALN. Different classes can use it. Different disciplines can use it. Different teachers can use it. Different levels of instruction can use it. And I think the best description of what's been done pedagogically with the DALN is in Michael Harker and Katie Comers 2015 article in *Computers and Composition*, about where they surveyed people who use the DALN in their classes and talk about the strengths and weaknesses of that use. Krista Bryson has also done an article on the DALN. And then there have been dissertations done on the DALN. Deborah Kuzawa work on the Digital Archive and especially the work she did with GBLTQ narratives is useful. And then the *Computers and Composition Digital Press* book that Louie and Scott and I and all the contributors did, called "The Stories That Speak to Us," provides something like fifteen or sixteen different curated exhibits of how those narratives can be used both in and around classes and classrooms. So I think there's so many of these different examples. People could go to Google Scholar, use "DALN" and find a lot of pedagogical description. There's also a book that Ben McCorkle, Michael Harker, and Katie Comer are working on aimed at the *Computers in Composition Digital Press*. And it will be a born digital book, and it will look specifically at how the DALN is used in different classes. So there's plenty of examples for people to dig into in the scholarly world.

Sam:

So tell me a story about yourself using the DALN in teaching. You mentioned the Black Columbus class that you've done...

Dr. Selfe:

Yeah, you know, I think... It's funny, the DALN, the presence of the DALN as a resource, changed my teaching because it led to the course on the Literacy Narratives of Black Columbus. Without the DALN I would not have done the course, and I think that course for me is probably the most important course that I teach because it takes me outside the university and into places that I don't know well enough. And so it's through the DALN that it was possible for me to do what I consider my best teaching, and that's another thing I'm very happy with in that regard. And I hope that class continues here at OSU as well.

Sam:

So what advice would you give to teachers about ways in which they can incorporate the DALN into teaching?

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Dr. Selfe:

I would say that whatever their purpose in teaching about reading composing practices and values, they can find a way of using the DALN to that end. But they have to think in inventive ways and aim at uses that really meet the teacher's and the students' values and ends. So the DALN is infinitely flexible, and the teachers and students need to be imaginative and inventive in their thinking about how to use the resource.

Sam:

What would you say were experiences in your life that best prepared you and helped you in a career in digital rhetoric and composition?

Dr. Selfe:

Well, it was that first effort to type my dissertation into a mainframe computer. That provided me the space to learn how to use technology as a tool for composing. I would also say that Michigan Tech, where the emphasis was on the use of computer technology, that was my first job. And because there was so much interest in digital technology and there were lots of computer... there were lots of machines, there were lots of networks, there were lots of different ways of using computers at Michigan Tech, I was able to play a great deal in those digital environments, because I had an excellent, Chair, Art Young. And he gave me the space to experiment and play and investigate, and supported the Center for Computer-Assisted Instruction that I ran for so many years. So that was part of it.

And then the other part of it was working with really talented graduate students, because each time you meet a graduate student, each generation of graduate students have different ways of communicating with and around digital tools and environments. And you can learn something new from every generation of graduate students, every graduate student you meet. And the pleasure of learning new things every year, every term, with every student is really a joy for me.

Sam:

What advice would you give new scholars in the field of digital rhetoric and composition?

Dr. Selfe:

Well I would tell them, I know that many new scholars are worried about tenure, promotion, and the way digital works are currently valued in departments of English, which tend to be a little bit more conservative, and sort of attached to the notion of the printed book, but they're changing pretty rapidly, and so I would encourage young scholars not to be bounded by the imaginations of the people who went before them, and not to be overly cautious in their approach to digital work. I would say play and invent and experiment and follow your passions in that work, and if the work is good work, it will be valued by the time you get to tenure and promotion. And the more you try and suss out what's going to be the value in six years when you go up for tenure and promotion, the less successful you're going to

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be. So do the work that you know to be good work, in the form that you know how to do it, and in the environments both digital and non-digital that attract you. And by the time you get to tenure and promotion that work will be valued. Now it might not be valued at the same place you think it's going to be valued, but it will be valued if it's good work and you will find a place where you can continue to do that work and experimentation and make your own contributions.

And I think I would encourage them to be bold. I mean it is -- when Gail Hawisher and I were involved in doing work in digital environments, there were a limited number of people doing that work, and it was a risk. But if we had been too careful and not engaged in that work, I think that would have been a loss to us. If we had decided that the profession was not keen on collaborative work, for instance, and we had done our individual work, that would have been a loss to us. So I think that you can't predict where the values of the field necessarily are going to go, but you can predict where you're going to do your best work and how you're going to do your best work. So be bold and do it and hold yourself to high standards, in doing so.

Sam:

If you could pass along only one story about literacy, what would it be?

Dr. Selfe:

[Pauses and balks] Hmm... well you know, Sam, I don't think there is one story about doing literacy. I think that there are... Everybody has multiple stories. I think I must have four different narratives in the DALN: one about the songs my mother used to sing to me; one about, you know, learning to read and write; and one about the ukulele today. You know, there are so many different stories I guess I'd encourage people to think in multiples rather than in ones because every story is really cool and sheds light on that infinite variety of human understandings, and values, and activities that we term "literacy" at this point in time, in this culture, in this environment

Sam:

Now that you are ending your career, what are you planning on doing once you retire? What is the thing that you are most excited for in retirement?

Dr. Selfe:

Well, I want to read and write. I want to put my feet up at the lake on the railing and gaze out on the lake, and read my, read the books that I want to read, and learn more about playing the ukulele, and travel, and learn more in that way as well. I think that those are the -- I would like a little more time to do the kinds of literate activities that please me and that I'd like to, I'd like to invest more of my effort in.

Sam:

So we've talked a lot about a lot of different things: digital studies and literacy. But is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't

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talked about?

Dr. Selfe:

I don't think so. I think the next... Here's what I would say to people were starting the profession: the next 10 or 20 years are going to be so totally exciting, so open and full of possibility for scholars. And there's so much to do and so many neat projects to take on, that I would encourage people to dive in, dive in and enjoy what they find and follow their passions and make their contributions that they can be proud of when they turn around and 20 or 30 years and somebody asked them, you know, "What did you do?" I want them to be able to be proud of the projects they've taken on, they've contributed to, and they've done within the profession.

Sam:

Thank you so much for this interview.

Dr. Selfe:

[Moves her hands into the shapes of the letters] O-H-I-O. That's great Sam.

Sam:

Thank you.