

Fall 2015 Interview – Dr. Elizabeth WARDLE

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JC: So, we have these, like, um, questions we've asked all the speakers, um, who've come in every semester. Uh, so, we're just going to go through all seven of them, and each of us are going to ask one of these questions. And that's how it's going to go. That's pretty much it. So, the first question is how did you get into literacy studies or rhet/comp?

WARDLE: OK, so basically I had no real plan for my life. So, I was a philosophy major because it had the most elective hours, and that was a good choice, but it did not lead to a career. And then I was...I had...I minored in Women Studies and Religious Studies, which also none of them lead to careers, but were...it was a lot of fun. So, I didn't really know what I was going to do, and then I started a Masters program in the humanities, um, where I thought maybe I'd want to study Nordic feminist fiction which was fun, but also I don't speak Norwegian so that was a problem. So, I didn't really finish that, um, but I read some really good Nordic feminist fiction. And then I went and worked at a food bank and was a fundraiser. And then I thought, "well, this is meaningful to the world, but I don't like being in an office from eight to five." So, finally, I went back to grad school to an English program, where I got a GTAship. And I started teaching comp, and then I realized that's what I really wanted to do. So, I didn't know what rhet/comp was. And I distinctly remember meeting someone who was a rhet/comp PhD student at the time. And I was like "I would never study rhetoric," and he said "do you even know what it is?" And I mean, I didn't; I had no idea. Um, but I love teaching, and I love teaching writing, and so after that, I was kind of hooked.

EW: So which scholars in the field, um, have most influenced your thinking?

WARDLE: Well, I think it sorta depends what time period you're looking at, but I think it's fairly obvious that, um, David Russell was my dissertation director. And I think that his view of Composition has really obviously shaped everything that I've done; um, so his sense that First Year Comp wasn't working and that, you know...you know he...he had theorized about that, um, that there was...you know that we needed to be doing something else there, and so I think that that has obviously influenced. So, even though I've done many things since then, and I think that his initial voice in my head is still really strong in terms of how I look at, um, systems and how I think about what's working and what's not. Um, yeah, so we could...I mean I could give you a very long list but-

JC: Keep going—we're interested.

WARDLE: It's not that interesting in my mind. OK, um, so I think all the people who talked about, um—basically, um, abolitionists. You know, the abolitionists who were thinking about, like, first year comp doesn't work; we should abolish it. Um, I think that really impacted me because my dissertation was sort of a discovery that, "yes, for sure, composition isn't working. It can't do all these things we think it should do." And so the fact that there were people who were willing to say something that seemed so dramatic, um, I think influenced me to not be afraid of imagining something that's really out of...sort of out of the box or out of the status quo. Um, and I don't know why but even though Joseph Petraglia; I don't even think he's in the field anymore. I mean, he's always in my head to talk about pseudotransactionality in the sense, of like, how do you provide students things to do that are actually meaningful and transactional. And so even though those are things that I read and thought about really early on, I think that they still...they just don't ever go out of my head. Um, and then, um, Lave and Wenger who are not even really in our field at all. Um, even though I read them really early on, too. I

think Wenger in particular keeps thinking things through, um, and advancing the theories about communities of practice and, um, expertise or what he's calling regimes of competence right now. And that idea of legitimate peripheral participation and what it means to, um, move into a community and learn the language of the community and the ideas of the community. Obviously that's still influencing me because that's what we're going to talk about threshold concepts, too. Like, how do you learn...how do you learn what people in a particular group know? And then how do you know that you are learning it? And what's that space like while you're doing that? So even though those things were things I read about and thought about very early on, I think they're still having an influence in how I think and what I do.

EW: How did you come upon, like, threshold concepts; how did you and, um, Linda start working on that?

WARDLE: Uh, so Linda actually came on it, and then I was working with Linda at the ELON Summer Institute. And so she, um...she was...she introduced us all to the idea of threshold concepts at that summer institute. And then I'm trying to remember what we were doing that led to the book; we were just having some conversations about something and then we started thinking we need to do something else. But I think...I don't know how she came across it, but she's the one as far as I know that introduced the rest of us to it.

TM: So, I guess the way this question is phrased I think it wants you to talk outside the academy but I think both are acceptable, um, because speaking in terms of life experiences and how they have further shaped your thinking. Also, I guess also in terms of writing studies and rhet/comp.

WARDLE: Yeah that's a big question. Well, OK, I'm going to give you a nonacademic answer. So, because I've been thinking about this recently. Um, so my parents were missionaries, and I was raised, um, early on, in Mexico where they were doing Bible translation; they were linguists. And so, um...so they worked with a group that...whose language was not written down and so their job was to write down the alphabet and then start translating the bible into that language. Um, so I...the older I get the more I think that being raised by missionaries, people who think that your job is to change the world, um, has had an impact. Like so even though what I'm doing has really nothing to do with religion at all, I think that notion that, like, you just go in and think "this can be different, and now we're going to sort of proselytize the view that we want people to take up" I think has informed how I do the work that I do. So, this sense of like, "we know things and we need to share them with the world because what we know can make the world better." Right, I think that sometimes the sort of, um, zeal or maybe enthusiasm with which I do those things was maybe just ingrained in me because of how I was raised. Um, I mean, when you're raised to think like you just go up to people's doors and try to save them, like that's just what you do. Um, really everything else seems doable, right? Because if you think about that it should be one of the scariest things that, um, you ever do. Um, and so I have talked to a couple of people recently about how that sort of evangelical, sort of proselytizing upbringing, impacts you know, your WPA work, but then also your, um, like, your sense of what...what texts do, and, um, I'm not really sure where...we've talked several times about doing a...maybe an edited collection or a special collection about those kinds of texts and experiences, and I'm not totally sure what that would look like, but I feel like there's something there, but I don't know. I haven't gotten very far in my thinking about it. But it just seems like how could that not color what you're doing and how you're seeing things?

TM: I guess as a follow up then, um, what do you think we should be doing in terms of proselytizing for the field?

WARDLE: Yeah, a lot more. [laughter]

TM: Any specifics, like what's something we could all do, like, starting today? Maybe not even that immediate, but you know. Because I'm interested in sort of...

WARDLE: Proselytizing?

TM: Yeah. [laughter]

WARDLE: Well, I think that we can never allow ourselves to be a discipline that only talks to ourselves. I mean, what we do doesn't work if we're not...like, what are we doing if we're only talking to ourselves? Everything we do is about things that everyone cares about and is impacted by and so, um, the longer I'm a program administrator and a department chair and somebody who sees how decisions get made at the university level and how legislation impacts and all that, the more I think we have to be doing grassroots efforts. Like, for example, I think it's pretty clear that pretty soon community colleges and dual enrollment are going to be teaching most of First Year Comp. Well, I think that war is lost, but what we could be doing is spending a lot of time with our community college colleagues and the dual enrollment high school teachers to help them, like, to work together with them, to be reading and thinking about the theory and naming what we know. Not the book, but just naming what we know. Um, because if they're going to be doing that work, then how do we make sure that basically we're not just reverting to an earlier time when comp was being taught, you know, outside of what we know from the research. So I think sometimes it's easy to think, to get overwhelmed by the magnitude of what might have to be done in order to make a difference. But, if you really think about how things get changed, they get changed by usually relationships between a couple of people. Um, and so figuring out where those places are that we could actually make a difference. And I've started teaching, um, our core class in our major is Rhetoric and Civic Engagement. And so in that class, the students have to think of something they want to work on and then create a civic engagement campaign. And the first time I taught that class, I thought "what is wrong with us"? My students are creating these amazing campaigns to raise awareness, to get people to understand what's happening, and all these things that they care about. Why don't we do that as a field? Um, and so, one of the things that we're doing this year at Cs is, um, we're gonna have this... an action hub that Linda created, but my grad students are coming, along with Bradley Dilgers' from Purdue, and they're gonna help people, like, take research or things that we know from the field and turn it into some kind of campaign for a broader audience. And so, um, the example that my grad students had was that they really decided dual enrollment was a thing that they were worried about and so they...they figured out that the point of possible change was, um, guidance counselors. And so, they said, "All right, so we need to figure out how to meet guidance counselors, how to talk through with them some of the pros and cons of dual enrollment." Um, and then they found out that guidance counselors are doing these regular parent-teacher presentations where they present on dual enrollment, so then they actually wrote materials that they could present at those meetings with guidance counselors. Um, and then they created a directed self-assessment that students could do, but they did it in BuzzFeed. Um, right, so that the guidance counselors could say to a student, "hey, maybe you should assess whether you're, you know, whether this would work for you or whatever." So, the point of that is really just...I think there's a lot of ways we can make change and proselytize, and it could seem overwhelming until you really start thinking, like, really it's just a matter of finding this one spot where a relationship or an action could actually make a difference.

JE: Alright, so, we'll move to your teaching now. What classes do you teach, which are your favorite, and why?

WARDLE: Um, okay. So, for a long time, when I was the Comp Director for many years, I taught Comp Theory, you know, the training class Comp Theory and Pedagogy, and Comp right? So those are the two I taught every year. Um, now that I'm not the Comp Director, I've been teaching in our majors. So, I've

taught Rhetoric and Civic Engagement, um, Writing with Communities and Non-Profits. This semester I'm teaching the Capstone class for our major. Um, and honestly, I really like them all. I really liked the Rhetoric and Civic Engagement because helping them understand that rhetoric is about doing things in the world and then seeing that they can create these campaigns and use rhetoric in all its forms to make change was pretty exciting. Because they came in thinking, you know, "what can I actually do?" And then they did this amazing showcase where they...for example, one of them did, um, a human, um, banner against guns on campus. So she had all these people in t-shirts like lining campus, about, um, you know, what are the impacts of having guns on campus. Um, and then another person just did this big awareness campaign about safety in the parking garages. So, like, the kinds of things that you could do, um, but that was really fun just to see them. And they all ended by saying, "I really didn't think I could make change in the world because it seems so overwhelming and the problems are too big, but now I realize, you know, they're not. And a couple of the girls who were from AD-PR wanted to do a campaign to change our understanding of the arts in K-12 education, and so they designed a print campaign to be put up in bus stops and on busses that was, um, they're tagline was, "Your child is more than a test score." And then they just had visuals, like a kid playing a trumpet or a kid doing whatever to try to get people to think differently. And so that was really fun just because it was, I guess, you know, going back to what rhetoric is really about. Um, but I do really have a heart for the Communities and Non-profits class, because, obviously, that's what my family has done, and that's what I did before I came back. And so getting people involved and working with community organizations, and then again it's like they realize, "oh my gosh, I could have a life where I could use, say, my ability to use social media, but I could use it for the homeless shelter or something like that." Um, that's really fun. So I think I like all the classes, and now I like Capstone too, because I'm teaching that right now, and we'll talk about that later today. So pretty much, teaching is the best part of the day. The administrative stuff is...yeah.

[laughter]

JN: Can you tell us a little bit about the capstone course?

WARDLE: Yeah, so we, um, so our major's brand new, right, so it's only less than a year old. And so we have 90 students, and so, we just...you have to have the capstone to finish, so I'm only teaching it...we're only offering it for the second time, so one other person has taught it before me. Um, so that we're trying to figure out what it is and what you're supposed to be doing in there. So what I decided was that half of it would be looking back, and sort of, naming what they know and what they've learned. So they read the first half of *Naming What We Know*. We talked about the threshold concepts, and then they were supposed to, um, do three invention papers where they brought in stuff they'd been doing over the past four years to try to figure out what threshold concepts had they encountered, which had they mastered, what do they actually know now, and then they're turning their attention to do a workplace study, the end of which they're supposed to say "given what I know, and given what I see what I'll need to do in the workplace, how do I need to repurpose, um, in order to be ready for this." That was my plan on that. It has not really not gone according to plan, because, as you'll see later today, what's really happened is that everyone seems to be having sort of an existential crisis; so, when we're talking about the threshold concepts I thought we were gonna be sort of reviewing, but instead, they, um, they're having this like massive sort of identity moments where they're really thinking, like, "I'm not sure I know that I don't think I can acknowledge that, I don't know if it's true, okay, if it is true, then it means all these other things I need to rethink." Um, and so, it's kind of hard to say "ok now, like, let's wrap up and name what you know so we can move on to the workplace study." Um, there's been a lot of crying and hugging, and we had to...we have to stop a lot and do deep yoga breathing. It's not where I thought it was gonna go, but I don't...I don't think I should have been surprised given everything we know about learning and identity. But somehow, I thought, like, "it's the end...right, so at the end

they've already had those identity struggles," but as it turns out, for some reason, I think now they understand enough to really understand what these shifts mean for them, and they're about to embark on this new...so, I really don't know what's going on in the class or what it should be in the future, but it's really interesting.

JN: Yeah, it sounds like it.

WARDLE: Yeah.

JN: Um, so changing gears, just a little bit, the next question is kind of, uh, I think it's my favorite from interviews, but, what's on your night stand?

WARDLE: Glad someone warned me about this question. Um, ok. So, you want all the objects? Or you thinking of a stack of books?

JN: Yeah. You can give us give us a scene; start large and get smaller.

WARDLE: If I'd have known this ahead of time, I would have taken a picture for you; um, well, it's a giant mess. But you know, there's a lamp. There's a clock. Um, there's a little tiny Buddha statue. There's jewelry that is, just, should have been put away, and then there's a bunch of books and magazines. Um, and then there's multiple books on the floor, and so, I'm just trying to remember which books are there now. So, there's one called *The Golden Present* by Swami Satchidananda. It's good; you should read it. Um, can I tell you what's in the book because then that would be so much more fun.

JN: Yeah.

WARDLE: Okay, so it's like a daily devotional but from Swami Satchidananda so he, um, obviously, it's about yoga. So he um...so you're sort of supposed to read for the day, but I just tend to read randomly, but I was reading one yesterday, and it struck me as really funny. So he was...he was telling a story about a guy who saw a scorpion getting washed away in a river, in a flood, and he said "oh my god the scorpion's gonna die, I'm gonna rescue him." So he goes to rescue the scorpion, and the scorpion stings him. And then so he says "ah" and like drops the scorpion and the scorpion goes back in the water. And he's like "oh my god the scorpion's gonna die", so he reaches in again, and the scorpion stings him again. And someone's watching him and he says "what is wrong with you? why are you keep rescuing that scorpion when all it does is sting you?" And he says "look you can't judge the scorpion, that's its nature, right, to sting you, and he said and it's my nature to be kind and compassionate." And so then Swami Satchidananda, says um, you know, "this is how you should be...you should be kind and compassionate, and recognize that everyone's nature is what it is" ...he goes but on the other hand, you could use a stick to rescue the scorpion."

[laughter]

WARDLE: so, yeah, a little bit of daily, but I actually found that book from my yoga teacher who tends to read from it at the end of class. Um, so then under that is, um, the...the second *To Kill a Mockingbird*...uh, *Go Set a Watchman*, is that what it's called? Yeah. Which I just finished, and I have it there because one of my thesis students brought it to me and that's kind of a funny story. So she came to ask me to be her thesis director, and then she brought me a copy but she accidentally had bought a copy in Spanish. And so then she took that back and then she brought me another copy later in the day, and it turned out to be the large print version, which actually was really helpful for reading it, um, so I just finished that, have you all read it?

ALL: No.

WARDLE: It, I don't know, I did not think the writing was that great, but then there are points where I think it's really interesting in terms of seeing...um, so my dad just died in February, or in January, and it was like, a lot of very traumatic stuff came up. And really, this is a book about seeing your father for who he is and recognizing him as fallible human being, and so those parts of the books, were really...it was good, but I thought she needed a strong editorial hand. I mean, it sort of wandered off and, um, so that's there, and then Deborah Brandt's book about, um, her new book about writing, um, I can't remember the title of it. And then there's another book about identity and power, which I'm trying to get through, but it's overwhelming. And there's, um, a Buddhist magazine, so it's...it's messy. I keep trying to clean it up and like think like "just keep one thing...why do you need all these things?" but...

JN: But if you only keep one thing, then your mind, at least my mind, constantly wanders to the other things that I put away that would be there. My night stand is like yours...it's like a stack, and I think there's, like, the one on the bottom and I'll pull that out, and I'll keep rotating them.

WARDLE: Yeah, and then it's random. I was looking for Deborah Brandt's all last week. I couldn't find it because we needed it to rewrite our mission statement. I said "I guess I must have lost it" and then I went and realized it was on my night stand. So, I don't know if that answers your...

JN: Yeah, it did.

WARDLE: What are you trying to gain from that question? I'm curious.

JC: No one knows for sure.

JN: I think it's the most, um, like I said, I think it's the most interesting question because it's so different for everyone; all of us seem to have, at least from my reading of the interviews, we all seem to have a lot of stuff on our night stands, but everything that's there is so different.

TM: I read it as being, like, an attempt to humanize us. You know, because everybody we bring in it's like "oh My Gosh! They wrote this and that, but they have a nightstand too!"

[laughter]

WARDLE: They have a night stand too! And it also needs to be dusted. Yeah.

[laughter]

JC: I think I have the next question, but I don't quite have it ready yet... ummm... Ok, so what...we kind of already hit on this a little bit with Travis' follow up question, but what do you think is the most important question that students in rhet/comp should be considering today?

WARDLE: Ok, which students?

JC: So I guess maybe graduate students starting in the field, or maybe even students in the major, which you kind of touched on a little bit, so... either/or.

WARDLE: I think those are *very* different questions.

JC: Let's go with, we talked about undergraduates a little bit, so let's talk about graduate students who are starting in the major...or starting in the field.

WARDLE: Well... MA students or PhD students?

JC: PhD Students.

JE: Or we could do both.

WARDLE: Ok... 'cause I've been thinking a lot recently about um... you know scaffolding and also you know thinking what we have to offer as a field. And so I think that historically there has been this big gap: we have freshman comp and then we have PhD programs. And so now that we... so really what were we producing in terms of people that go into the world that practice our profession? Right? So if you think about like an accounting major, they're producing...if you get a BS in accounting, then you go be an accountant, but we didn't have that in our field. And so now that we do, I think it's an interesting question about...so if you have an undergrad degree in rhet/comp what does that mean that you are and that you do? Um, so I think that's a very different question than "what should an MA student be getting", because it really does depend there...like not every MA student is gonna go become an academic. So I think it's a similar question to what the BA student should be getting. So if you're not going to become a... you know *Me*, then what are you... what are *we* helping you do? What is that we have to offer that you're not getting from going and being a communications major, um, or an English Lit major. Um, and I think that we're still trying to figure that out, um, which is why I'm not answering your question at all...

[laughter]

WARDLE: But I think obviously, for PhDs, I guess most of those people are going to become academics, and so for them...um, I was actually talking to Michael Neal and Morgan about this last night...um, I think that we...something that we all need to be doing, that maybe doesn't happen in doctoral programs that much, is learning to think strategically about, um, our field and how to do the kinds of things that we've been talking about. So I think you learn *about* things, right? So you take a class in X or you take a class in Y. But really, like, my entire professional life has been about, well, if you know these things from research, how do you enact them in a program? If programs are grounded in, um, assumptions that are misconceptions, how do you make change? Um, that involves knowing how policy works, how procedure works, how you persuade people to do things that they might have a variety of reasons for not wanting to do. Um, and then thinking about how what *you* do individually, as a scholar and then in your program, has an impact on the rest of the field. Like if you decide that you wanna try MOOCs cause you think that's fun and interesting, it does have an impact for the rest of us, and maybe you should think that through before you... you know take money to try that out. And, um, and I don't think that we get trained—I have a strong opinion about it—and I don't think that we get trained to really *think* like that. I think we get trained to think "I do this thing, and I'm really good at this thing, and I wanna spend time doing this thing," but none of us... everything we do is, not to sound too yoga for you, but everything we're doing is connected. And so I don't think that we get trained like that. Um, and so you can do some esoteric random thing that you're really interested in, but every time more people do that... I think the bigger question is "well, what's our field's identity?" I mean how are we getting presented to the rest of the world? Are we gonna survive if everyone just does random esoteric things and doesn't think about "what's the underlying philosophy? how is what I'm doing impacting our field's ability to make material change", right? I mean, so... an example is: if you... so we've worked really hard at UCF *not* to rely on adjunct labor in First Year Comp. And that was a really big deal; we convinced the president. So we don't, we have full-time faculty who teach first-year comp. But now we have a major; the major is growing really fast, and so I'm about to have an, I think, an ethical problem, right? So do I

say, "Well now to grow the major, I'm gonna take these full-time people *out* and and put them into teaching the major? Going right back to adjunct labor in First Year Comp, which is what we just attempted to get out of? I mean, *no*, I'm not gonna do that, but then if we don't grow our major...we need a major in order to be visible, in order to be credible, in order to be seen like any other department on campus. And so, well how do you manage that? Well, you have to think about what you actually need is more... you need more people, right? You need more full-time people. You need to learn how to make a case that's convincing so that you can get more hires of the kind that you want. And so how do you do that? And I think that all of these are things that you don't necessarily learn in graduate school. And if you don't learn them on your own, then I think it's just human nature to just think about what you're doing individually. Um, and I just really worry about us as a field if we're not thinking strategically. Back to one of the first questions you asked me, like "how do we proselytize basically and explain what we know?" Because what we know *matters*, right? I mean if other people don't know what we know, they design terrible assessments that hurt students. For profit companies are making money off the backs of students. Um, so there are material consequences for us being able to do that effectively, but those are not really the things that you spend time in grad school learning how to do. And I don't think it's intuitive to figure out how to do those things. Um, so, I think that, I mean, I just taught, for the very first time, a grad seminar in WPA work. And that's the class in which they were designing this campaign, right, to work with guidance counselors, and to do all that, because, really, at the end of the day, I was like "if you're going to go out in the world you need to change it, and you need to think strategically, so we're not going to theorize about how to do that, you need to figure out how to do it." And so we actually sort of created a, um, a heuristic for how you have that conversation with yourself and each other so you, like, you map out who has power to make change, who are all the stakeholders, where could I actually make a point of contact? Um, and so those six students came out of that class and said "I see everything differently now." Um, and even they said--I'm really going off your question but, um--they even said now when they look at PhD programs, they have a lot of questions they wanna ask about "what's the labor like here? Um, what are the bylaws say about governance?" Things you would normally not think about, um, you know as a new grad student. But, I think that if those people get through grad school and get out into the world as academics, they'll be really effective at, you know, helping us strategically get our field where it needs to go.

EW: So, that, I think, kind of leads nicely to the last question, which is, um, where do you see the field of literacy studies or rhetoric and composition going?

WARDLE: I feel kind of like the, um, you know, like if you go to a fortune teller, and they tell you, "well, I can tell your future, but anything could change, right?" I mean, I think that it really depends on, uh, how—sort of like what I was just talking about—I think it really depends on what we decide we want to do and be together, and I see these sort of opposing forces. So, the force behind our book was this idea that you can have a discipline that enacts its values—some of its values being inclusivity, for example—and still manage to know things together that you want to share with the world. But then there is another force that says, you know, rejects any sort of, um, unifying force as exclusionary or monolithic. And I do understand that that's a concern, but I also think that you can go so far toward that that you basically destroy any chance you have of making change. And what concerns me is that people say, "well, you just want to have a discipline to have the power." Well, that's not true at all! I mean, except it's true in that, yes, I would like to have the power for us to make *good* policy. I would like for us to have the power to make *good* assessment tools, right? That's the kind of power that I think that we want, and I don't...I don't see why you would reject that kind of power because people are suffering when we don't have it. And so I do think that there are these sort of opposing forces in the field in terms of, "are we gonna go ahead and say 'yes, there are things that we know, and we need to have some power in order

to enact them.' Or 'no, we reject the notion that we, you know, want to have any kind of power because, you know, that could be a negative thing.'" And then I also think that it's possible that we can be so fragmented and specialized in terms of what we know that what happens to us is also what happens to literature, right, that everyone has their own little niche thing. And I think you need some of that, but if that's...you could go so far down that path that it kind of...there's nothing really unifying or holding us together. So, I don't...I don't know where we're going.

[laughter]

And I think that that question is also linked to what's happening in higher ed, um, a lot of which I don't think is good. I mean, I think that there's this sort of effort now toward this competency-based education and less time on task and get people through as quickly as possible and let's make modules and let's do self-paced online stuff that students can just get themselves through. They're taking the teacher and the expertise and the personal contact out. Um, and if those forces win...I mean, that is what we *do*, right? And so, I think there are people who would really love for us to be, you know, not to be present so that they could sort of just, you know, make self-contained modules that students could test their way out of. Um, and so, I think there's a really deep need for us to explain how learning works and help people feel comfortable with the fact that learning is just messy and takes time and requires you to do actual things, not just, like, test your way out of to prove that you know something. But all that's going to require us to do a really much better job of explaining what we know and talking to people other than ourselves. So, I don't know. I think it's kind of up to you all what's going to happen. No pressure.

EW: So, I was going to ask this later, but it seems relevant now. You kind of mentioned at brunch...or at breakfast how you've used the threshold concepts to talk with administrators and that it wasn't...it didn't go very well. Could you talk a little more about that? Like how you've found threshold concepts helpful for those conversations?

WARDLE: I don't remember saying that at breakfast. What did I say?

EW: You said you sat down with someone, um, and you were talking to him about threshold concepts, and he was trying to sort of—

WARDLE: Oh! The provost.

EW: Yeah! There you go.

WARDLE: Oh, well, um...so our provost is into modeling and predictive analytics, right. And so he wanted to talk to me about threshold concepts, and I was explaining about...not any particular threshold concept, but the idea that learning hard things is messy and takes time and, you know, you're in this liminal space, and blah blah blah. And all he kept wanting to do was figure out how we could, sort of, scale it up and, you know, make this into a model, and you know. And I was like, you have a totally different understanding of learning than what I have. And so I think that basically what went badly there...I mean, we had a really great conversation, but I didn't...I wasn't prepared. Like, I didn't think that's the way that conversation was going, and so twice now I've been in conversations with him where I've just thought, "oh! I just need to gear up for this. I don't understand your language, and so I need to get a better handle on when you use these words about modeling and analytics and this and that, I need to understand what you mean so that I'm better able to speak your language when I'm trying to explain to you why...like I'm sure there must be something good in that—

[laughter]

if I can understand it, then I could maybe find places of common ground for us." But because I feel like he's speaking...he's just speaking some other language, and so I have to learn to understand him so that we can have that conversation.

EW: So, sort of like Peggy O'Neill's argument in her chapter in the book about assessment and educational measurement?

WARDLE: Yeah. Yeah. You can't even talk to those people if you don't understand what they're...you know...because they're always...they're always going to be a step ahead of you because you can't even respond to their arguments because you don't understand their terms. And that's what's happening to me now when I'm talking to him. So, I have to start reading things I'd rather not read.

[laughter]

But I think that what he's doing is really what a lot of people want to see because wouldn't it be...it's so neat and tidy if you can just say, "well, we'll move at these steps at these times" and if you could just take out the difficulty and, um, the identity issues and all of that stuff that happens with learning. So...

JC: Does anyone else have any follow up questions before we end? Well, thanks! That concludes this wonderful...thanks so much for talking with us.

[laughter]

WARDLE: Thank you!

TM: Yeah, that was great! Thank you.