

Fall 2014 Interview—Terry Myers Zawacki Interview
Interview Team: Megan Keaton, Jenn Enoch, Julianna Edmonds

JEnoch: We'll start by, sort of, introducing ourselves. I am Jennifer Enoch. I am a second year PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. Most of my research is in, um, identity studies and in genre and digital writing.

MK: And I am Megan Keaton. I am also a second year PhD. Um, it was wonderful when I got there. That first year was interesting. Um, I am interested in digital and multidmodal literacies combined with, um, self learning...thinking about how do people actually self...self-teach in the digital realm.

JEdmonds: And I am Julianna Edmonds. This is my first year in the PhD program here. Most of my past work has been on, um, the history of women's rhetoric, but I'm still open to new ideas and deciding what I want to do for the remainder of the time here.

JEnoch: So, we will get started. First question: How did you get into literacy studies?

TZ: Um, when I looked at that question, I was thinking "Gosh, it's been a long time." Um, I was...I started out as a junior high teacher right on the border between El Paso and Juarez, Mexico, and so I had a lot of students who were Spanish speakers and maybe not necessarily speaking or writing very well in English if at all. Um, and then moved to New York where I was teaching high school, and then ended up doing my, um, other work, my master's and doctoral work. And I was teaching at an open access-institution in New York and there...there were so many students who...I was teaching writing courses and writing courses in, um, communications and architecture and the majors at that institution. So I just got...became very interested in teaching writing; so, I think that that's how I came to it. I didn't come to it through a choice of saying "Oh, I think I'll go to a doctoral program in writing." So, um, and then I just continued that, and I've been very interested for most of my career in writing centers, but ...but, predominately writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines. And also women's studies and gender studies. I've...was affiliate faculty in, um, that program at...at George Mason.

MK: Um, which scholars in the field have most influenced your thinking?

TZ: Hmm...you're talking about a person who has been in this field for a long time. Um, as probably other people you have interviewed have...might say the same thing. Um, I would say, early on, it would have been people like Mina Shaughnessy and, um, some of the people that were working on basic writing because I was at open access institutions. Um, I have been quite interested in the scholarship on gender and identity work. So, I'd say a lot of work on identity which fits in with my current interest on...and, um, research areas on second language writing even though that's not a background that I had. I was self-taught...self-taught...um, so in, um, I think in gender studies it would have been, hmm...gosh, people like Gesa Kirsch and some folks like that and early on Belenky...the Belenky collective... and, um, just sort of exploring but even then I was interested in across

disciplines and the sort of women's ways of knowing in different disciplines and the epistemological, um, connection to identity. Um, currently...I have always read a lot of the WID scholarship, so Chuck Bazerman and, um, predominately Paul Prior and people like that.

JEdmonds: So, what about your life experiences? How have they shaped your thinking? That's a big question.

TZ: That is a big question, and, actually I'm glad you asked that question because I'm a first generation college student. My, um, father is a factory worker, and my mother was a homemaker. I have five siblings, so...and, you know, times were fairly tough growing up. And I think...so as the first in my family to go to college and when I said I wanted to go to college, my father said "Why would you go to college? Basically college is wasted on women. And, you know, you are just going to stop out and you will have a...you know, you'll have a family and be a wife." And I said, "I think I can do more than that." And...but I didn't really pursue it in high school. I was taking secretarial courses because that's what women did. You became a secretary if you didn't go to college, or if you did you became a teacher or a nurse. And so, I was taking secretarial courses, and my best friend was planning to go to college, and I thought, "You know, I am smarter than she is. I'm the better student. I should be going to college." And so I did. I got a scholarship, and I went to college. And the first meeting I had - I still remember this - as a freshman, this was at Southern Illinois University, um, meeting with the advisor in this great big auditorium...and we were just assigned people, they weren't like close people who kept in touch with you, and I remember he opened my folder, and he said, "Oh, it says here that you are probably not going to stay in college." And I said "Why? Based on what?" Well of course because I hadn't had the prerequisite courses in mathematics and I had secretarial training. So I think I was always aware of somehow starting a little bit behind where others may have started, which is probably why I have been so interested in populations that have had different kinds of experiences than maybe, um, mainstream, whatever that could mean, headed to college...students.

JEnoch: What classes do you teach, and which are your favorite and why?

TZ: Um, well I'm retired now.

JEnoch: Or did you teach, I should say.

TZ: Um, undergraduate courses are the ones that I taught the most often, and it was one I helped design was a writing ethnography course. And that was for English majors, but it could also be taken by students from other fields and frequently was. And students wrote an ethnography. They, I taught them how to do ethnography methodolo...methods and um they did fabulous projects, and it was just so fun to work with them on the different things that they were doing. And for students one thing that made it really fun is that the students had never done anything like that. And so they too were like, "Wow this was fun." And we knew it was going to be a lot of work because I always had a reputation of being a very

tough teacher that required a lot but supported students and so um they would say, “Ya know, we heard how much work it was but wow it’s so worth it.” And some of them, they were turning out 70, 80 page ethnographies, ya know with all of the other apparatuses that they had to have with it, the consent forms and the IRB and all of those things. So, that was for undergraduates. I always liked to teach First Year Comp also. I didn’t get a chance to teach it very often because I was typically teaching this writing ethnography course *or* graduate courses. Um graduate courses, the two I taught would be, were the Comp Theory course, which I really liked teaching, and uh the Pedagogy course. So um I tended to like the theory course, the Comp Theory course, a little better because I really enjoy theory and I enjoy thinking through theoretical positions. And, and my work...has always been about testing theory, ya know. So you’ve got this theory, and then but wait, was anybody tested this empirically? Has anybody looked at it? So that’s ethnographic piece.

JEnoch: What did you like about, about First Year Comp?

TZ: Um... ya know they um...this is a sort of odd position about First Year Comp, is that you don’t want it to be this kind of I’m helping these students understand something being in a university because we’re always struggling in the field about how Composition is a field and, ya know, we have a scholarship and it’s not about, ya know, helping these students become acclimated... acclimated to college and all of the other things we *know* happens in that course, but are often not written about because that’s, ya know, how we’re positioned. We don’t necessary want to position ourselves as these uh... mother f...teachers, for women. And the earlier question about scholarship that’s influenced me has always been Susan Miller, her *Textual Carnivals* and *Rescuing the Subject*. And her chapter, “Sad Women in the Basement,” about how that—do, do any of you know it that?—uh, yeah. So, how it constructs the subject, the teacher of Composition and, ya know, just in the way she constructs her students. So there’s always that um... push/pull I think. But it’s so interesting to work with those students and to see what they’re writing about but also just to see their adjustments. Would you agree?

MK: Absolutely.

JEdmonds: Okay so, here’s a personal question. (Megan laughs) What’s on your nightstand?

TZ: (laughs) Uh um... oh, my gosh. Um, probably a stack of about ten books. (Julianna laughs) And most of them are nonfiction cause that’s what I tend to read. I read travel, a lot of travel. I read memoir. I read, uh, history. I just finished, this is historical fiction, but Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*. And um... uh, [unintelligible] *Bring Up the Bodies*. That’s an, takes place in the um Henry the eighth and it’s about Thomas Cromwell. I read a lot of history in that period. I always think I was somehow must have been born again. That that’s who I was and I thought, “Geez what women would wanna be living in that time period, ya know? (laughs) Unless you were royal. But maybe I was. (everyone laughs). Then, on my desk I have a different set of books and what those are, is the work I’m doing right now on

dissertation writers. And so it has to do with um... uh, genre theory, activity theory, uh transfer, that k...those are the things I've been interested in.

JEnoch: What do you think is the most important question that students in Rhet/Comp should be considering right now?

TZ: Uh... hm... I mean how do you say what the most important is? I think the most important is, for me, I always struggle with is, do we need composition courses, required composition courses, if you are building a strong writing in the disciplines program, because it is for everybody in the university to be teaching the students how to write in their fields, and that goes back to genre systems and activity theory, communities of practice, um. So that is certainly an important question, and we also know that the first year comp course keeps graduate students like yourself paid and occupied for your work. So I mean there are all sorts of structural problems around that that I'm sure you've been aware of or know about the writing about that. Um, so, I think that that is a big, big question, is the role of particularly the first year writing course and the relationship of TAs to that course and as a labor force in a university, um. And then the second most important and maybe they're both up there is what um in a global, in an internationalized institution, university, there were all multilingual and international students and the mix of that is what do we need to know in composition studies about working with these students. That to me is quite pressing and it's what my work has been now. Interestingly, you notice, I didn't say anything about online and digital literacies um and the reason I would not put that at the top of my list is that I think students are acquiring their own self-taught literacies in those spaces and have a lot to teach us, especially people like myself. So I think it's important work and I know there is so much work being done on expanding what we think of as writing and um all the affective and the gestures and the visual and all those things. And I think that is important but that would not be at the top of my list. Sorry. What do you think is the most important?

JEnoch: In going back to your first point, and the idea of the role of first year composition, that sort of speaks to, not just the role of first-year composition in the university but what the role of first year composition is in the field and what rhetoric and composition looks like—

TZ: Yes

JEnoch: ...without that FYC component.

TZ: Absolutely

JEnoch: So I was going to ask back at you, what do you think that the role for rhetoric and composition becomes both in terms of dealing with or teaching students who are multilingual or in terms of eliminating that FYC component?

TZ: Um and there are a lot of arguments around eliminating it, you know, particularly coming from WAC circles and um genre people too. But um that is such a good question

because when you think about multilingual learners, you think about first generation students, you think the resident immigrant students, it does help play an important role for acclimating them to college and helping them understand what it means to be an academic writer. So it plays that important role, but we don't talk about it enough, um. And then also it's really contested about what they should be learning anyway. You know, as I'll say something about it in my talk today, you know, so, um, I think that these are questions that your generation is going to be working through, and I was interested at lunch today with Kendra and Jason and Molly and all three doing application of theory to practice and real hands on practice. So I think that I myself love theory as I said and can get really caught up in it, but I do think we need to see how that is going to play out because we are a practitioner field. So you didn't answer me. You just turned that question right back on me.

TZ: Do either of you have an answer for that?

MK: I'd have to think about it.

Jenoch: You know, and I don't know. And the answer I would argue changes depending on where you are and what you're doing. Coming to uh Florida State University, I've sort of been forced to deal with the digital literacies and things like that in a different way because it's a different part of the program versus working at CSU Pueblo which is an access institution and had a number of first generation and multilingual writers. So those kinds of things had to be more present because those were the kinds of students coming through my classrooms and then I was dealing with the writing center every day.

TZ: Yeah, because the writing center work is where you also really see it and why it's also so important that we're thinking about these questions.

MK: In thinking about writing center work, I don't think this is something the whole field needs to explore but, um, I think we need to think about with multi-literacy centers and digital studios that we have how do you train the tutors who are working in there. Because what we have set up there now mostly focuses on writing center theory so people are very prepared to work there but then transferring that into the digital studio context is a little weird. I mean, you still have the rhetorical situation conversations but now we're dealing with very specific technical skills in these programs. So students want to know how do I do this thing in Photoshop, which is very different than understanding things about written texts.

TZ: Or understanding how that thing is going to communicate if you do it in Photoshop. Yeah, and also I think with writing centers, thinking about that, how you do that thing, I mean that thing, in early writing centers was how do you organize a paper, how do you write this five-paragraph theme. Um, so much writing center pedagogy grew out of the shift to expressivist pedagogy and the um, a lot of our writing process research that was right there on the forefront and so I think we're still using tutor training techniques that grow out of pedagogies that may not be as useful to us right now. Um, I—I used to always teach—when I was directing the Writing Center, I always say to tutors and write: we tutor

the writer, not the writing. Now, I think we tutor the writing, um, in all the ways that means that if it's fixing that thing in Photoshop, you know, so it's a, it's a shift in the way we think. We're not necessarily prepared for that shift. Like, I agree with you totally that we don't yet have a good pedagogy of Writing Center tutoring to address those things.

[Indiscriminate casual chatter]

MK: Um, this is sort of where we've been talking. Where do you see the field of literacy studies and/or Rhetoric and Composition going?

TZ: Yes, and I think that we have, um, probably talked about that. Um, and how—the answer you get that from people, I think, will depend on where your scholarship is, and what kind of work you've been doing. So, I'm going to say it's going to communities of practice and—well, it is there already, um, how students learn and translate and transform what they've learned about writing and all of these different contexts including digital contexts so that I would say as if not wherever we're going, it's where we are. Do you agree with that?

MK: Do you guys have any extra questions?

JEnoch: One quick question about the Writing in the Disciplines courses. And this is sort of a general question; I'm curious. Um, in the institutions we've worked or [indeterminate] who generally teaches those courses? Is that something that is done by professors in the discipline? Or is that something that is done by—like at CSU, our Writing Center director does it, or is that something—does that make sense?

TZ: I think it depends on what the course is. So, if you have writing intensive programs or writing intensive courses in the majors, the people in the majors teach them. They don't necessarily like to teach them. But they're expected to teach them, and if it's a smaller institution, um, they will teach them and then some disciplines are quite writing heavy. I don't know if you've read Michael Carter's "Ways of Knowing and Doing in the Disciplines." That to me is a must read for anybody in this field. Um, because you begin to understand that, um, some, some fields—they know the field through writing. And they *do* the field through writing like history. Like literature. The hu—much of the humanities, well not dance or art, um, and then other fields, you—you writing to write about it but that's not if you do the discipline, through writing. And so I think it's important to understand how people do their discipline what the epistemological foundations are and that how they do it and then you have a sense of how important the writing is or isn't not going to be to students. And when you teach it, or when faculty are teaching it, they know their fields. So they know what sort of sorts they're supposed to be doing.

MK: Anyone else? [pause] Okay! Thank you so much.

JEnoch: Very good. Thank you so much for taking the time to speaking with us.

TZ: Thanks for interviewing me.