

This is a transcript of the video clip "Cindy's Definition, Metaphor, and Importance of Literacy" 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:

So, what would you say is your definition of literacy?

Dr. Selfe:

Well, my definition of literacy is the activities, the events, the understandings, the values, the experiences that are associated with reading and composing using shared symbolic systems, either mathematical notation, musical notation, alphabetic notation, so using all of those systems or any of those systems. But also understanding that the practices and the values of literacy, because values are a part of literacy, are shaped by the cultural context, the historical context, your economic context, your linguistic context, the geographical location, your geographical location in the world. And that literacy varies widely, those experiences, those understandings, those values, those practices, those events, they all vary widely depending on the context within which they are practiced. So I don't see literacy as one thing, but I see it as a whole complex of factors and events and practices and values that surround reading and composing in different systems.

Sam:

So would you say that you have a metaphor that guides you or gives you direction in this view of literacy?

Dr. Selfe:

To me, literacy is not a thing but it's, I would liken it to the Particle, Wave, and Field Theory, that is, you can have a literacy practice that's a particle, an event that's a particle, but that event or those practices change over time and place so it's a field. And then finally the practices and experiences and values happen in a context so it's also a field, literacy is a field, a context. So to me, literacy is both a particle, a wave, and a field, and in that not bounded by one time or one place or one context.

Sam:

Why do you feel like literacy is important, and why should we be studying it as a field?

Dr. Selfe:

Well, I mean it's what makes us different, it's what makes us human, and it is the activity and understanding that makes us that ties us one person to another person. So it's the -- literacy is a way of staying in touch, and sharing what we know, being human. And for that reason alone I think it's well worth studying.