

INTERVIEW 2: RAW TRANSCRIPT

Note: full names are used in this transcript because the parties involved have given permission to release it into the public domain with full identifying information.

Note: The transcription was done by Terry Wood, a CART provider who dialed into our (in-person) conversation in Robin's office via speakerphone, and typed into a shared text document on my computer. Typos and punctuation were left as Terry wrote them, and a horizontal line divides the “storytelling” part of the interview from the “member check” portion, with #hashtags placed there by myself and Robin during the “member check” process.

Pilot Interview - Feb. 14, 2013

Response to 5th year PhD student in Social Psychology describing Introductory Social Psychology writing course

ROBIN: This is Robin

MEL: So what I'm going to do is clear the document of things that are this is going to be split into two time segments for you. One I'll be interviewing Robin, correcting revisions and that kind of thing. Then we'll pause and then have a reflection on what it's like to have the transcription going on. So I'm setting this up a little bit and Robin, if you were my real dissertation subject this is the time at which things would be going and set up already when you log in and so forth. So I want to give you a moment to glance over the narrative that I probably should have printed.

ROBIN: No, this is fine.

MEL: Okay.

>> You are quick. What's your name,

>> Terry.

>> [Laughter]

>> Are you still there?

ROBIN: Yeah, I'm reading.

MEL: so I want to take about 15 minutes for this first round of just getting your narrative.

Don't worry about reading all of it and actually want to talk with you about the engineering, thinking series of engineering department

ROBIN: Whatever the title of the class is. Thinking.

MEL: And about the class that you've inherited and sort of rewrote and revised and maybe that add to the story to the one you're reading here

ROBIN: Uh-huh

MEL: If you could, what aspects of the class you're teaching now and the way you're reworking it might [indistinguishable word] by the stuff that you're reading

ROBIN: Well the example that you're showing me is somebody who here is this class and here is the big book, you know, of all the stuff that goes with the class. For the thinking class, you know, there wasn't a big book. In fact I contacted you to find out what happened when you did it. So that was essentially, you know, copies of all the readings, the version of the syllabus and we had all of a day to sort of sit down and try to have something quick so that the students in the class had a clue of what to do the next week.

#BIGBOOK

is there such a thing that has all the answers?

do you need to make it your own, always?

[Laughter]

MEL: Uh-huh

ROBIN: So it's been an interesting story in terms of not having a fair amount of information about what was done in the past, and not knowing why she chose the things that she chose to read, and not really seeing the pattern and not really even seeing a, you know, a set of questions that she might have had in her mind. It was just wide open. You know, the downside of that is we didn't really feel comfortable just saying we will do exactly what she did because we don't know exactly what she did. [Laughter]

#BIGBOOK

as information placeholder -- what are the goals

terrain *and* map to navigate it?

"written as if it's meant to be shared"

in contrast to History & Philosophy, which does have a "big book"

MEL: Right

ROBIN: You know and then it was well we can't be her. We have to be whatever it is that we can be. So then you and other folks started getting e-mails about can you tell me how she used time in class. Can you tell me she assigned 6 readings. It's like 2 hundred pages. Does she really expect you to read all that? I can't assign readings if I'm not going to read them and be responsible for it. I don't have time in my life to read 200 pages in a way to be responsible for it. So a lot of it was trying to pull together stories from the student who took the class, the materials we had from the last time it was taught and trying to find a way to very, very quickly come up with something to give to students so that there was some stability, some direction immediately.

you would have thought maybe we could have spent time before the term happened to anticipate this and plan it out but in so many ways we didn't want to rock the boat and we were just, because we wanted her to show up. I realize part of this transcript is we're teaching a class for which the faculty member didn't show up should probably be in there. So it was a very strange experience. I don't know if there was a big book of like this is how to teach the class.

#BIGBOOK

A book for the teacher, not necessarily the student?

If I would have necessarily gone ah, you know, here is the recipe. This is what I will do this week. This is what I will do next week to kind of see the big story so that I could confidently do it

. So when we're looking at the things the class does we kept, for the most part, the structure.

We really liked the idea of the structure. We had to change what the course project is because we didn't really have the resources to pull it off, the course project being the term paper and we didn't really have the resources to go through cycles of feedback and then read 20 papers. We just didn't think we could pull it off

MEL: In terms of resources you mean faculty time?

ROBIN: Time, time. It's all time. It's the one thing that you can't go and get more of. Even though there were people who were willing to help, we were realizing that actually had its own cost at the get go and now maybe we're more open to it but at the beginning there was not the time to sit with people and come up with a plan. We needed to do something as quickly as possible. So yeah, I mean in looking at this thing and immediately thinking of what would it have been like to have the big book of how to teach this class and how would I have flipped through the big book and how would I have used it, and, you know, I probably still would have tried to figure out what were the big ideas.

#BIGBOOK

MEL: Uh-huh

ROBIN: If the big book had that, I might use that but the big book didn't have that because that didn't exist. [Laughter]

MEL: The big idea, are you envisioning like the big book would come with like the 3 big ideas of this class are A B C?

ROBIN: It wasn't something that would be like in a syllabus like the 3 big ideas of this class are, you know. Because we got those although we actually crafted those in terms of what we thought were the big ideas.

MEL: [Inaudible]

ROBIN: Well we wrote the objectives. I mean lots of words on the syllabus that are things about if you don't show up for class and you're sick. We didn't change that. We rewrote the objectives because again we needed to think about what were the big ideas that we can get on

board with and that we could constantly keep coming back to as the thing that holds the class together. So with using the cap and [indistinguishable word] understanding idea and Ruth and I went off to the places and came together for coffee for an afternoon and said these are the ones I think and those are the ones that you think and then they were essentially the same.

MEL: Did you have to read through all of the readings?

ROBIN: No

MEL: How did you come up with the structure?

ROBIN: Well in terms of the big ideas, they really dealt with how do you make sense of this stuff. So, okay, you're going to be reading a whole bunch of theories about human development. We're not going to give you a test at the end of the week and say which one said this.

MEL: Uh-huh

ROBIN: What we wanted is we wanted to develop or improve your ability to be able to engage with these ideas, make sense of them on your own, summarize them and think about the various limitations of them. That kind of connected to a bigger idea which is, you know, these are a whole bunch of really useful theories but there's not a single, universal theory. Every single one of them has limitations. The reason they all exist is because they are each speaking to a weakness or something that wasn't addressed somewhere else. So we wanted that to be part of the practice, that you were in thinking that the limitations it wasn't about critiquing the heck out of it, you know. Blah blah and just attacking it. It was about being able to understand why this idea in combination with another idea might help you get at the thing you want to do. The so more about seeing connections and less about just attacking. So that ended up being an en- curing idea. So it was the things about being able to learn how to make sense of these things on your own, summarize them, find the key points, being able to understand both the strengths and weaknesses and then kind of bubbling up into the bigger ideas about how can you use these ideas. So use them either to think about curriculum

development or use them to think about studying engineering learning. So it was kind of had that triangle connected thing. Once we did that then it meant that when we came back and looked at each week and looked at the readings we selected. We were like well we're not going to give you 200 pages because we actually, you know, it just didn't seem very feasible. In an effort to try to manage that level of reading you might miss the point. So we tried to pick readings that we thought did a really great job of illustrating the idea and were organized in ways that you could, you know, we can help you sort of figure out what are the key ideas of this particular theory. We tried to always make sure that there was some sort of reading or a section of a reading that somebody was talking about with strengths or weaknesses or what this doesn't do. We're always trying to include a reading where there was something that either illustrates how you use this to do research or how this might relate to designing learning environments. So smaller number of readings but focused on speaking to the ideas.

MEL: So it sounds like when you talk about the big book you basically made your big book or in some sense because your big book was a subset of the /SKWRAOEUPBL big book that you got [indistinguishable word] you did get a big book but you turned it into your own.

ROBIN: We had the big book of the parts but we didn't have the story. The only story we had of the big book was what the syllabus was before.

MEL: Okay so you got a not particularly a navigatable

ROBIN: Right, exactly. Because we would look at the stuff and go why is she having you read all this stuff. We kind of came up with our own stories of things. What's been happening, and thank God these students are flexible because we're trying to kind of be at least a week in advance so we can really read each thing and be very clear about stuff. In the process of doing that we're noticing that some of the selections that she had that we're using are not what I would have chosen.

MEL: Okay.

ROBIN: For example so Ruth and I are taking turns so kind of again sort of the time issue to acknowledge that this is work load we were not anticipating and how to be pragmatic. So I did the Vygotsky piece (sound problem) how are you going to speakoh, okay. So one of the key things about the Vygotsky is the idea of a zone of proximal development. She didn't have any readings that went really into that or critiqued it or connected it to how people were using it. So I looked around for that one and then in looking for something that would do that I came across a paper by one of the authors that we were going to do the week after that, that was essentially a keynote talk about him talking about the people that we had read before him. It was like what a great opportunity to have this person sort of sit back and talk about these two theories because these are real people. Their ideas didn't come out of some magic box. They came out of something interesting. So there's a lot of to kind of speak to the limitations and strengths and it sort of carried a story line connecting the various people that we were reading so that again kind of counteracting a desire to say oh, this is a bad idea. I won't use it, to like this is a good idea but it's flawed.

MEL: Okay.

ROBIN: So

MEL: So I'm going to kind of sounds like we've come to a bit of a hard point and I wouldn't do this in an actual interview, just so you know. I usually have better-- this methodology thing and what I'd like to do is put a marker here and Terry, you can keep transcribing, but what I'd like you to do and I think I'm going to do this simultaneously but you're Robin so I'm going to try it

ROBIN: Catching me at the end of the day.

MEL: So what we have is, as you can see, the transcript. We'll skim through it. We're not going to read this data an but see what it's like to look through things and quickly

ROBIN: What would you be looking at?

MEL: [Indistinguishable word] and also in general one step back what was it like to talk and have it transcribed and the practice is set up. I noticed that you were looking for oh, how do you spell Vygotsky at the time that both of us were not looking at the screen.

ROBIN: There were times I was looking at the screen and acknowledging that it was writing stuff. Then I realized that I couldn't really watch it and talk at the same time because it would just it's like information overload somehow. I think if I was going to go back and look at this, you know, I would do sort of the simple things of, you know, are there funky words that can be fixed or is, you know, looking for the parts where what I said was I really don't like this but it comes across as I really do like it. So those sort of glaring like no, no, no, I didn't mean that.

MEL: Okay.

ROBIN: Part of me is wondering what would be the benefit of being able to do the bracketed thing, you know, like if I was going to point somebody to like that was a key thing that I think I was trying to deal with or something

MEL: Yeah,, so let's try this and see. I think 13 minutes left of Terry time we have. Instead of skimming over this not going through it but thinking about what was an interesting part you might want to come back to. So I think, we might have different ideas but anything that really jumps out to you from that conversation and go what did I say about that.

ROBIN: Well I mean I think one thing is this idea of there's this, you know, the big book. Even using the language the big magic book that has all the answers, you know, and kind of me sort of thinking about is there such a thing as the big book that has all the answers. Ultimately I had to make it my own. I think that was something I was thinking about.

MEL: Okay. So I'm marking that a little bit on line 22. So big book text just as a way of annotating. This is all very rough and improvisational. We have the big book you talk about so there wasn't a big book. What else you talk about having the big book? Talked about the effect of not having

ROBIN: Right

MEL: Not having a big book.

ROBIN: Right. So the big book being the placeholder for information about the class, what we could do, what are the key points, you know, what are the goals. You know, the image that comes to my mind is, you know, in K-12 instruction there are these big books, you know. They're binders that have this is a lesson plan and for each lesson plan these are the objectives and these are the reasons we do it this way and this is what you do and this is how you spend your time and these are problems students may have and here are the resources. So it's sort of this, you know, it's written as if it's meant to be shared which is probably why there was no big book. [Laughter].

MEL: Because she didn't put that stuff together thinking ah, some day I shall pass this class on to other people.

ROBIN: Yeah.

MEL: Another thing I sort of heard you talk about and I'm looking up in the transcript, there's 2 ways you're talking about the big book. You're talking about what would it be like to have the big book of materials and at first I thought you meant if we had something that had all the readings and didn't have to go out and ask what papers there were and what books to read and all that stuff. Then I realized actually you've got that. In fact, the student whose story you're reading that's the kind of book they had

ROBIN: Right

MEL: It wasn't official. It was shared. It was meant to be shared but it didn't sound like there was a look I'm teaching this class and here are the learning objectives, here is how you go about it. -- so you talk about the big book, are you talking about the raw material from which I'm going to pull myself together, like the terrain or are you talking about here is the guide book or the map or the outline?

ROBIN: Well it's funny because for the history and philosophy class there is a big book. So

what the big book is, is me and Alice sitting down and talking to each other about well what are the big things we want students to get. How could we use the time to help them get there? What problems might we anticipate that they're going to struggle with? How can we use class time to not only get at some big ideas but help develop tools to figure things out on their own? . So it's an electronic big book and it's not pretty. It's not meant for consumption really beyond us. We would sit down and it was also because we taught collaboratively. The it was the place where we wrote checking if we were all on the same page. It was also the way of you're going to take the first half of class and I'm going to take the second half of class and just being clear to each other about what that means, and if there was something there that was, you know, on oh, you're going to do this and get this point across I don't get what you mean by that and you can help he me. So it's a place where we had conversations about the class. So it didn't necessarily look pretty but it captured those pieces and it had qualities of for the first 45 minutes we spend out time this way. It's a partnership for 3 hours and you know what you're going to be doing. So at some level we're kind of creating a version of the big book for thinking, not in the same way that Alice and I did for history and philosophy but Ruth started this idea of making slides. So we actually have slides for the class, not to say that we get up there and present, but the slides are places for us to connect to, and they end up being like the points we want to get across or the connections we want them to see and then it goes up with the other materials that the students can access if they want to go and get to that too. So it's a little bit-- it doesn't look like the behind the scenes story like the dirty, the one that Alice a
nd I have. It's a cleaned up version that we're using in class and as a resource for students. So it's the, the book is coming out of the process.

MEL: There are really, really interesting big book, what does it mean-- down but since we have Terry for 10 more minutes probably, the pause and call back in a little bit and think about what we've been doing here. So more I've been going through the transcript and

tagging. This is, interview cap on, Robin. -- and put your Robin my advisor hat on from a method perspective.

MEL: This is fascinating

ROBIN: Yeah. I mean hmm lots of different things going on in my head. I mean I I think the thing of tagging stuff is, you know, I've been rambling on for God knows how long and the tags are kind of the short story. It's like what are the key things that I talked about, and it's where am I struggling with finding words to explain myself. It's also as a method it's providing a way for us to do a version of triangulation from the standpoint of you kind of saying well there's something important that seems to be going on here and then you get to hear it again from my point of view.

MEL: Yeah

ROBIN: So I think that's kind of interesting. You know because the transcript is up there you can actually point to my words instead of your memory of what the words were or the connection that came into your mind. So like the big book is like my language, and you could have said something else. You could have said oh, a curriculum module, you know. And I would be like no that's not the big book.

MEL: So does that-- talk about the triangulation. Does that depend on having as an [indistinguishable word] having a transcript in front of you right now help make things more solid somehow? -- memory and couldn't quote your words back to you, you know-- basically. If this wasn't to print.

ROBIN: One of the things, another thing of what I was talking about were the pragmatics of time. So what you did is you asked me to reflect on something and I did it cold. I just started thinking about it and I like talked in circles. So being able to do, so have the opportunity to do that is its own thing. Being able to come back and look at what I said the moment is actually an opportunity to kind of solidify some ideas or to see for myself

what I was trying to figure out versus, you know, yeah you're going to send this to me in another week when it's transcribed and then I'm just going to magically have some time.

MEL: Right

ROBIN: And then I'm going to do stuff. So it's kind of like you have me now. Use me now. That's one of the, very pragmatic because pragmatic I cans was seen in the big book.

MEL: The conversation but they'll have this on top of each other. We're not going to get a beautiful clean unified story. Part of that is my job taking it back and messing around but in terms of this is the raw material-- anything explosive you may want to take out before you say this is the raw material. Do you feel like at this point you would be able to do that, that if we had another 20 minutes just to worry about that.

ROBIN: Yeah, I mean in this particular scenario it has some bad stuff attached to it and if I had said some of that stuff I would like to have had the opportunity to take that out. So the bad stuff being, you know, this was a class that was taught by somebody who didn't show up.

[Laughter]

MEL: Right

ROBIN: That on its own doesn't look so bad. You know, this goes out into the world the minute people know it's me, it's-- you know. If I had said something like I'm going to give you something politically charged, this is somebody who didn't get tenure and as an act of rebellion didn't show up, you know, I think I would probably be okay with it was a situation where a faculty member didn't show up but the other one I would have the opportunity.

Hmm, it's not necessary. It's not necessary for the story, quite frankly. You don't need to know that.

MEL: The story

ROBIN: Right

MEL: And the story you talked-- oh, this is the part where you said that. How would you like to change that.

ROBIN: Right and giving me this directed me to the big book. I don't know if I would have said the big book.

MEL: Okay. So I know we didn't refer back to that very much but it was a jumping off place instead of me sitting down going tell me about.

ROBIN: Yeah at 5 o'clock at the end of the day doing essentially not as well as Terry is doing it but sitting in a meeting writing notes for an hour and a half my brain fatigues. I don't know what I would have said without a prompt. The reality is any prompt is a good prompt.

MEL: Yeah. Okay Terry I know that this is the end of the time we have with you. So this is a stopping point. Is that okay for you.

yes.

okay. Thanks

ROBIN: Sorry I was-- so

>> Okay buy guys.