

California State University, Monterey Bay



Oral History Interviews

Digital Proximities
Covid19 and the transformation of pedagogical practices

We Better Start Preparing for Distance Learning

Interview with
Emily McDaniel
Recorded on April 08, 2020

Juan José Gutiérrez
School of Social, Behavioral and Global Studies

Digital Proximities 004 McDaniel

Emily McDaniel

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1 **00:00** [Music]

2 **00:10 Gutiérrez** *Emily McDaniel thank you so much for taking the time to join me. As you*
3 *know I'm creating this archive. It's a very informal archive or experiences. I think it's important*
4 *for us as educators to create a record of what we're going through this really interesting phase*
5 *of the coronavirus. So, if you don't mind, I would love for you to start by telling us a little bit*
6 *about yourself, your context, the school that you work at, and anything else that you might*
7 *consider relevant for us to know.*

8 **00:40 McDaniel** Definitely. Thank you for having me, so much. This is this is really great.
9 I'm so glad to give back to both you and CSU Monterey Bay, because I am alumni, and also,
10 we're fellow educators. So, well okay. First of all, I am 44, I am a teacher of second and third
11 graders. I've been teaching since, let's see here, 2005 now... I actually went to CSU, Monterey
12 Bay for my undergraduate work, it's just the Liberal Studies course. After that, I went to UC
13 Santa Cruz, and finished off my education with their Credential Program, and then went right
14 into student teaching. Well, not student teaching, I'm sorry. First year teaching, and I decided
15 that the first school that I worked at would be a charter school, which was great experience. I
16 worked for a little charter school called Oasis, in Salinas, and I was there for a year. And because
17 I was fresh and new, I wanted to experience, not just the Charter School road, but also the
18 regular public education road, and I worked for Gonzales Unified School District for two years.
19 That was, you know, completely different style of education. It is very regimented: "Here's your

20 book, you know, and this is where you need to be..." and stuff like that. Everybody was
21 awesome, and very hard-working. It just wasn't my path. And everything worked out and my
22 husband actually found a new position in the IT world, because he is an IT engineer. He got a job
23 with Sutter Health Care in the Folsom, you know, Sacramento area, and so we moved. And the
24 school that I found was a charter school again, and I'm there ever since. I'm such a big advocate
25 of charter schools, and with California Montessori Project. We keep growing: every few years
26 we get bigger and bigger, because we combine Montessori, quality Montessori education, with
27 common core standards, really successfully. Everybody is a big family. All the educators in the
28 administration, and the families, become part of our family and it's just a wonderful experience.

29 **03:40 Gutiérrez** *Is common core exclusive of California. What is common core?*

30 **03:48 McDaniel** Common core is big state and national standards in the United States right
31 now, and it's what came after the *No Child Left Behind* stuff. It's, you know, it's got its
32 advantages, and it's got its disadvantages. It still does depend upon yearly tests, which some
33 people are against. This year of course, because of *Corona* we have been, we've been allowed to
34 not do the tests. There will not be any State testing.

35 **04:29 Gutiérrez** *What are the years that you're teaching?*

36 **04:39 McDaniel** I am what is referred to as a six to nine teacher in the Montessori world,
37 which is second and third grade to everybody else. I teach in a semi-rural area. We have a higher
38 population of Caucasian students. However, our demographic has definitely changed over the
39 years, which is awesome. The diversity is starting to become better and better, which I'm excited
40 for, because I love teaching all different children. We are, I guess, socioeconomically, a little bit
41 higher socio-economically, even though we do have students that do come from some
42 households that are not as high economically. The area that we serve, kind of well, I mean it's

43 mostly El Dorado County, which is Placerville, and El Dorado Hills, Shingle Springs, Cameron
44 Park, and that...

45 **06:07 Gutiérrez** *...that area beautiful country which is visited recently in Placer be*
46 *wonderful!*

47 **06:07 McDaniel** It is. It's really great. A few people from Elk Grove that come over to our
48 school, but charters, so it's a school of choice, and it's quick excited about it, you know, anybody
49 can go in the general area.

50 **06:34 Gutiérrez** *So, you're teaching at the beginning of this academic semester, normally,*
51 *and then all this happens. Tell us the story: how do you live the whole transition from where you*
52 *were at the end of the semester, to where you are right now?*

53 **06:46 McDaniel** You know, it's funny. We, I was having one of my best years of teaching, I
54 think, it was like, oh, it was funny! Because, first, this year we've started on beautifully. We had
55 a few bumps in the road, in my personal class, as you do every year, with like a few behaviors
56 here and there. But we had gotten to this beautiful kind of familial environment in our classroom,
57 we had normalized... everything was awesome. I was looking forward to just going into Spring
58 and then Summer vacations, you know, everybody being, you know, very successful and then
59 bam! this happened. But I have to tell you that and I don't know if there's been a whole lot of
60 study yet, but in this area of California before the actual coronavirus thing hit. We were hit with
61 some really bad flus in our area, that actually were really aggressive, and then some stuff. And
62 we're all wondering if Corona didn't come through sooner, because, oh yeah, it was fevers were
63 high, they lasted days. We had you know sometimes half to one maybe one third to one half of
64 our kids out, for like weeks. And cycling through a couple of kids here and there would relapse:
65 body aches were some of the stuff going on, nausea... I mean a lot of the Corona symptoms. And

66 we were experiencing very interesting symptoms before any corona came about. So that's
67 something to notate. When this happened with corona it wasn't like it was shocking but it was
68 like: "Huh? Yeah!"

69 **09:06 Gutiérrgez** *When did it happen? Two or three weeks ago? When did you stop going to*
70 *school?*

71 **09:15 McDaniel** We stopped going to school when I mean basically everybody it was
72 announced: "No more school, nobody's going in." It was the same time...

73 **09:22 Gutiérrez** *Do you remember the date?*

74 **09:24 McDaniel** Oh gosh. Beginning of March? Wasn't it? Or mid-March, like right down
75 there.

76 **09:42 Gutiérrez** *I know you're asked by the school administration to just stop going to*
77 *school?*

78 **09:47 McDaniel** So, what happened was: we were asked to get lots of extra work together
79 for this. One thing I love, another thing I love about our administration is they're really on top of
80 things, and they got word that it would possibly happen, that we'd stop going to school. So, they
81 said: "Send extra work. Maybe even put together a little work plan, that students could have at
82 home because this might happen, we might not be coming back. Let me get back next week, it
83 could be that we don't even, we don't even come back like Monday, maybe not." So, we got
84 everything together for the kids. We sent home extra work and then by Monday -no Sunday, I
85 would say it was announced: "Sorry, we're not going back." And so, right then and there, like our
86 school went into, you know, proactive mode, and said: "We better start preparing for distance
87 learning," and it was weeks before a lot of other schools did. And so, I love our administration.
88 They're really proactive, like that.

89 **11:00 Gutiérrez** *What happens to your classroom. How do you transform your classroom*
90 *from an interactive face-to-face weekly daily session into something virtual? How do you do*
91 *that?*

92 **11:16 McDaniel** You know? Zoom had a lot to do with it. We've had like daily Zoom
93 meetings with our administration, and our grade-level teams, to plan this whole guidance
94 education. And as a team we've put together plans for doing that. For example, I started having a
95 once a week Zoom meeting with my class. We started using our Parent Square Program. It's a
96 communication program a lot of schools use, and sending lots of emails, and messages about
97 work they can do at home to help supplement in this time of at home with this. And I feel... I'm
98 a parent too, so you know, it was a lot of emails, and a lot of messages. I think those have calmed
99 down now, in the last couple of weeks, but just lots of communication, Juan, because we're all
100 learning to this is not something we do on a regular basis, and so, to make everybody feel
101 connected we've done Zoom meetings, we've sent lots of links to PE activities, Learning
102 Activities, anything we can find to help out our families at home feel not alone, in all of this.
103 Yes, you know it's all about connections.

104 **12:50 Gutiérrez** *I know you mentioned that the socio-economic background of your*
105 *students. Maybe middle class and I'm not sure we should be talking about digital divide here but*
106 *do you do you feel like the new conditions that we're experiencing right now are burdening the*
107 *families with the extra weight that it's difficult to handle. Are you feeling a push back from the*
108 *parents saying: okay this is a lot of a load on us.” How is the relationship with them?*

109 **13:24 McDaniel** Um, yes, and yes. So, first of all in our area, one of the things we have to
110 deal with is some people don't have computers, and aren't able to get great Internet or any,

111 because they're in rural areas. We researched and provided some links to free internet service
112 during this time. We've also we have Chromebooks at our school, that we use

113 **13:56 Gutiérrez** *So it's laptop computers right yes? Were those given to the students?*

114 **14:02 McDaniel** Yeah. We check them out to those who needed them. We provided a
115 checkout service, so that they would have a computer. The other thing is some family is now,
116 they're having to work from home, and they might have two, three, four kids, and so having to
117 juggle technology is so challenging. So, having that extra Chromebook or two, helps out a lot.
118 We also provide paper packets to families for pickup outside of the school, if they don't have
119 access to a computer. We are happy to, you know. Even get Internet because of their rural area. I
120 have one student in my class that is out far enough to where there's just no Internet. So, he will
121 come and get paper packets.

122 **14:56 Gutiérrez** *I see yeah. The big elephant in the room, when we talk about digital
123 teaching, is that, particularly at younger ages, it is all about the interaction. How are you
124 keeping a sense of how your students are doing and learning on their own? What do you make of
125 that?*

126 **15:22 McDaniel** Well, so, I am in a Montessori classroom. And as a Montessori School we
127 have an extra hurdle, because if you are familiar with Montessori education, it's based on using
128 materials, manipulatives, and it's extra hard. So here, again, we have the Zoom meetings. We are
129 calling our students and talking to them on the phone, and by Zoom, checking in with them,
130 checking with their parents, seeing what, you know, they're noticing, as far as successes, needs,
131 etc. We also provide paper copies of Montessori materials that can be cut out and used. We don't
132 have, you know, we're not able to send home the physical materials with them, at this point in
133 time, So, there are also some digital ones, online, that are free or low-cost. We will be, next

134 week, we will be starting a true distance learning program through Google classroom. Our school
135 actually has created a whole part of our website, which has a digital work plan, that students in
136 each grade level can go to and pick what we call them jobs. You can say work tasks, or
137 assignments, basically. That they can do Language, Math, Geometry. We do stuff, we call
138 cultural in Montessori, which consists of things like Botany, Zoology, Visual Art, Performing
139 Arts, History... all that good stuff. So, we have tasks for daily use, and it's very organized and
140 concise. So, on the side of the work planner, you also have extra learning experiences that you
141 can choose from. Our school also uses something called iReady, which is a program that has
142 Math and Reading and Language Practice, so we're also... -I think I didn't address this earlier-
143 we're also keeping track of students work through that. It shows us how the student is doing in
144 their work and progressing. What they're having a hard time on, and it caters to every single
145 individual student, based upon how they assess, and how their daily work is and...

146 **00:00 Gutiérrez** *What is the class size?*

147 **00:00 McDaniel** We have lower class sizes. So right now, I have 21 students.

148 okay

149 **00:00 Gutiérrez** *So that helps, right? It does help state the fact that you do not have
150 humongous classrooms.*

151 **18:32 McDaniel** Yes

152 **18:34 Gutiérrez** *Emily, we're kind of running out of time. And I don't want to close without
153 asking you to make a little bit of a reflection for us, as to what are the things that you're learning
154 as an educator, as a pedagogist. Things that you might want to keep from the current
155 experience? Maybe we're discovering efficiencies that we can apply? Maybe this is forcing us to
156 reconsider some of our practices? So, how do you feel about that?*

157 **19:08 McDaniel** I see that there are some great things, I think the efficiency is definitely
158 something that we need to keep from it. I think the distance learning part is a good thing too
159 because there are a lot of kids that do a lot better in this world doing distance learning. I think it
160 would be neat for every school to be able to have that branch of their program, and of certain
161 teachers that just do distance learning. I think it would be a great way to cater to other students in
162 the area, and bring them Montessori education through distance learning. What else?... see here. I
163 think that it's good to have this on hand because from now on, there could be more issues like
164 this that arise: more sicknesses that come up, that we need to do this, and if we have it in place,
165 then we're prepared.

166 **20:10 Gutiérrez** *Emily you're a teacher, you are a mother, so I can do see how your*
167 *context is really complicated, because you have to do your teaching at home too. I want to*
168 *congratulate you. I have been congratulating every educator that I've been fortunate to talk to*
169 *these days because what you are doing it's just keeping the most important part of our society*
170 *going, which is the creating opportunity for the next generation. So, thank you for that. I hope*
171 *your family continues to being well, and thank you for your time.*

172 **20:56 McDaniel** Thank you too. Thank you for this opportunity

173 **20:57 McDaniel** Thank you!