

California State University, Monterey Bay



Oral History Interviews

Digital Proximities
Covid19 and the transformation of pedagogical practices

This Helped me Think of The Really Important Things in Life

Interview with
Francesc Reverter I Sabaté
Recorded on April 09, 2020

Juan José Gutiérrez
School of Social, Behavioral and Global Studies

Digital Proximities 005 Olvera

Francesc Reverter | Sabaté

Recorded on April 9, 2020

1 **00:00** [Music]

2 **00:13 Gutiérrez** Francisc, muchísimas gracias. Voy a empezar de nuevo... Francesc!

3 Thank you so much for accepting my invitation to have this conversation. Our common language
4 is Spanish, but we have chosen to speak in English so that we can have a wider audience of what
5 I hope is going to be a series of recollections of educators, across the globe, as to what's going on
6 with education in light of the situation with this pandemic. So, thank you so much. I want to start
7 by asking you to introduce yourself, by telling us where are you, what's your neck are the forest
8 in the planet, and a little bit of your background, the background of your school

9 **00:13 Reverter** So thank you very much to you, Juanjo, for this invitation. While I teach
10 in a secondary school, here in Alcanar. It is a small town in the south of Catalonia in Spain, and
11 we have, well, I have many different courses. I'm teaching here first of, which is 12 years old
12 students, and have another class. I have three classes of first of ESO ESO [*Educación*
13 *Secundaria Obligatoria*/Secondary Compulsory Education] and then I have another class of
14 secondary and *Segundo de ESO*, second. This will be a third-year. And then have I have another
15 class. I'm a master teacher. I have a one last group. It is from students that are in the last course
16 of secondary school. They are preparing to enter university. And this may be the most difficult
17 one because, well, we have to consider our points, no? We have to situate that even this the
18 school is compulsory. They have to attend the school they don't have a degree until 4th of ESO

19 Some teachers asks themselves and, well, “maybe I'm advancing the things that we want to topic
20 later” but just up until fourth of ESO they don't have any title, let's say for legal validity right?

21 **02:57 Gutiérrez** Any formal degrees that they can use...

22 **03:01 Reverter** They have a formal degree in *sexto de primaria* [6th of Elementary School]
23 but it's like this is just primary, it is just preparing a students for getting the title, the degree in
24 secondary school. And it would not be there's a teacher, I read, she made a post in Facebook, and
25 she was saying... how will we say? That another... -I don't even remember the names in
26 Spanish- syndicate union oh yeah and she was saying that we, first of all, we have to care about
27 the students, and how are they feeling and not put pressure on them. And up until now, here, the
28 education has been exercises or what we have tried to prepare for our students but was not
29 compulsory, it was not affecting grades. So, this is what I have tried the most. Just to make my
30 students comfortable.

31 **04:23 Gutiérrez** Comfortable, because they are they are confined in their homes and they
32 cannot go out and everything has to happen at home, right?

33 **04:31 Reverter** Well, we had we have had different scenarios up until now. I don't know
34 exactly but it started like four weeks ago, I think. It was it was a Friday and then, the schools
35 closed. So, at that point the first days, it was not very clear what we had to do. This this last week
36 we're on holidays, right? Right now, we are on holidays. And it is said, but it's not sure, that after
37 holidays we'll have to assess the students. It will affect their grades.

38 **05:17 Gutiérrez** I see. So, the closure started on March 18th or so. On that date.

39 **05:33 Reverter** Something like that. Yeah, I think so.

40 **00:00 Gutiérrez** I forgot to ask you: what's the size of your school? And the socio-
41 economic background? You have as a whole what, 300 students 500 students? How big is the
42 school?

43 **05:52 Reverter** Yeah, maybe it three hundred of students. My village is about between
44 eight thousand and ten thousand ten thousand students. The social economic background is more
45 or less average. They are average, some of them. But some of them have also economic
46 difficulties. We can say, I don't know for all of them, but this happens everywhere.

47 **06:23 Gutiérrez** Is this a rural area, mainly. Is this a middle class, a rural middle class, in
48 Spain punished by hardship? What is your population makeup? Do you have lots of immigrants
49 or is it mostly traditional [rural population]?

50 **00:00 Reverter** The percentage maybe ten, I don't know, 15 the percentage of immigrants
51 or immigrants is about ten or fifteen percent... but they have been here for many for many years,
52 you know. So maybe, for example, I remember when a student that returned to her country but
53 mainly they say that their families arrived many years ago, and they stayed here. Even, in fact,
54 they have different languages: they can speak Catalan perfectly, and I have students which if I
55 talk to them, I don't know, if they are natural from my town,

56 **07:34 Gutiérrez** *So, compared to the rest of Catalunya and other regions in the Peninsula,*
57 *how bad are they now? How bad is the situation in Alcanar? What are the rates of infection? Is*
58 *it similar [to other places in Spain?].*

59 **00:00 Reverter** As far as I know there has been just one case report. So, this is a rural area
60 and I think it helps as it doesn't have a big concentration of population and people has... they go
61 to the countryside, they normally, or many families have a house where they used to spend the
62 summer. Many of them, I think went there, because it's like better for the kids.

63 **08:42 Gutiérrez** So, you were asked to stay at home and this has been enforced very
64 aggressively right like you can really not leave your place well as you go buy groceries so what's
65 the situation?

66 **08:55 Reverter** Yeah. It has been the last, I don't know, maybe a couple of weeks. It has
67 been in force, or compulsory, that we cannot leave our homes. But before, I mean, when the
68 schools were closed, we were allowed to be in the street, and, for example...well at the very
69 beginnings the authorities didn't give us so precise direction. So, what do we need in particular
70 one, I think, it was the case in many in many other families, is that we went to the countryside,
71 even if we don't have a house to stay there, well we have a dog out there and we have to give
72 food to him, and also it's much better for what. We have three kids at home, right?, the two of us,
73 the three kids. It's like they need to do some exercise, mainly to feel in contact with nature.
74 Fortunately, we have we have a balcony where we can see the sea, and the countryside from our
75 house. Our house is not very big, but I think this can be a problem in places where they have to
76 stay in small flats.

77 **10:18 Gutiérrez** ...In really small apartments. Yeah. I follow some stories and people can
78 get really creative.

79 **10:26 Reverter** They have to, no other possibilities.

80 **10:38 Gutiérrez** So, let me take you back. You get an announcement from the school
81 administration: "We are not coming back to class," from one day to the next. Did you have time
82 to prepare or was this just all of the sudden and there was little time to prepare?

83 **10:49 Reverter** It was a Thursday and have just one class in high school, so I was already
84 at home. And when they announced that, I thought: "Well, I have my computer and that's
85 enough." I didn't thought that the situation was gonna last for so long. For example, next week

86 we're having an evaluation of our students and I don't have grade and I said that. "How am I
87 going to put the degrade if I don't have an exam?" We'll see what's going to happen, but I don't
88 think it's for... I don't know how to do it.

89 **11:37 Gutiérrez** Let me see if I get this if I understand this. They told you will close in the
90 school but did they ask you to find a way to interact with the students or the school is just locked
91 and there's no classes. so what's the situation?

92 **11:53 Reverter** Yeah something... well the formal announcement in fact it was made on
93 Friday. They just said that there were not going to be classes and I thought the situation was
94 going to be like a couple of weeks. Yeah, that was my impression and I think it was the
95 impression of most of the population. In fact, in other places the did not even stopped classes. In
96 Catalonia maybe they stopped classes a little bit earlier than in other places, a little bit, I'm not
97 sure. So, I didn't know what to do and what to expect. And at the very beginning they just said
98 let's just put some work to our students. That were the directions I had.

99 **12:46 Gutiérrez** So use you prepared some packages online, and distributed them through
100 email? Or what did you do?

101 **12:56 Reverter** We have already during this course I was using I was using well Google
102 Classroom in one group, and a similar to Google classroom, which is Moodle, I think it's the
103 appropriate word in English. I had a Moodle with my first of ESO students, and with my second
104 of ESO students, I had, we were we're using Moodle. So, we were using it in class, to deliver
105 some tasks, and to interact. We were already using it before. I have been using it with my
106 students before, So, they were used to it. The problem there was, there were some students that
107 don't have the key to access Moodle, so there's that's the first problem. What happens with this
108 student that don't have the option? Well one was just a couple of days ago, but for other students

109 I knew that they didn't have the username or password to access it. So that was the first key. But,
110 as I considered that it was not compulsory I didn't worry much about it and I know that my
111 students have a WhatsApp group, for the whole class, so if a person wants to work or wants to do
112 something related with my subject, they can ask other students through these WhatsApp group,
113 which is not official, but they use it to communicate it frequently.

114 **14:40 Gutiérrez** They find a way. So, you mentioned a few moments ago, Francesc, that
115 you are being asked to evaluate your students the next week. So, and how's that going to happen?

116 **14:55 Reverter** I don't know, but we have we have Friday. We were already in holidays,
117 but Friday at 8 o'clock we made a department meeting, and I proposed to change the percentages.
118 I said: "Let's put 40%, 40% and this last third term just 20%." Oh see them doesn't want. I said in
119 these terms. Doesn't want this first we have to understand that if students have to stay at home it's
120 going to be a different situation. For the students that have a tutor, or whatever support, or even a
121 teacher, that is they are paying, and it's helping them, then the students that can not afford that or
122 they don't have the support that I can give to them in class. So, I think we have to consider that
123 very much, and we have to be very careful about that. So, this was my suggestion. But it is not
124 sure, it is not sure that what's going to happen. And then, after considering that, we also changed
125 because, well I didn't think about an exam the same way we were doing exams before, right? It is
126 true that the system is starting to change, and the evaluation form is not necessary through
127 exams. We have like activities in class and I mean, many other things that may, guide us to a
128 final evaluation.

129 **16:54 Gutiérrez** So, it is becoming more of a continuing evaluation as opposed to
130 everything towards only the end of a semester, which seems to be a practice that's well

131 established in Spain, right? Like students just go to classes and then at the end there's an exam
132 or something. Yeah. So, you're switching to more of a continued evaluation.

133 **17:13 Reverter** This is what the system's what the system is trying not because of the
134 situation right now, but in previous years they had already started this kind of shift of the
135 evaluation and of the practices during the teaching and learning process. But considering that,
136 even, I just thought that maybe we just gave some activities and the students do it. Which in the
137 end my objective is the students to learn, yeah, doesn't matter how the students learn.

138 **17:57 Gutiérrez** ...and still probably reach most of the objectives that you had set out to
139 reach at beginning of the academic year. How's your communication with students? I know that
140 this is a vacation [period] right now, this week, and later but are you being able to stay in touch
141 with students? Are they reaching out to you? or are you reaching out to them?

142 **18:22 Reverter** Now, this is the main problem in fact. This is why I don't see how this is
143 going to work. Because, well, first of all, as I said, I considered these activities were not
144 compulsory, so, they were not to be obligated to contact me or to do the activities. That's how I
145 understood it I don't know how they and try to do it, right? If they've tried to do it, the feedback
146 I've received is very poor. Just a few of them contact me either through email or through a forum
147 that I established on purpose. Well we decided to establish work for every week. So, this is the
148 way the work for this week right, but very few very few got feedback this is the main problem
149 but I consider that as it was not compulsory and the indications were not very clear. This may be
150 one of the factors that lead to this lack of communication. That's my point.

151 **19:53 Gutiérrez** I'm trying to keep these clips to a to a certain extension, so we're going to
152 be running out of time soon, in even more so if I am not collecting my thoughts carefully. So,
153 anyways, before we close the conversation, I really wanted to get your perspective as an

154 educator. Unfortunately, it is possible that we will be facing a similar situation in the future. I'm
155 really hoping that not, but you know, it's likely. So, in my conversations with other educators
156 will have been wondering what is it that we can learn from this experience, and what is it that we
157 can try to change of our practice -personal and institutional- to be better prepared for these
158 situations, and maybe to learn from the situation and be better prepared. What are your thoughts
159 on that that area of learnings and possibilities?

160 **20:53 Reverter** Well, another thing I want to say before that is, for example, that I
161 suggested to make some videos and be like a YouTuber. I have a friend of mine who did that,
162 and I asked my colleagues if they were trying to do that, some of them who are doing online
163 classes with me, like we're doing right now, right? Online class and even in school class.
164 Especially with the older which are supposed to have like an evaluation to be able to enter the
165 University at the end of the summer, in July. So, yeah, and these are the older and these are the
166 ones that I had less feedback. I don't know if they are working on their own, if they are mature
167 enough, but some of them, they were really good students. And I haven't had even an email. Not
168 even one. I'm doing that or doing the other one. The notes I gave to them, I'll explain and some
169 of the exercises are done but I was just interested in "hey, how is it going? Can we meet to see
170 how you're doing, maybe to point out any particular exercise?" But this were the most difficult
171 group to which I had to work with. And then learning from that, well I was a teacher at a
172 University and I was doing online classes with University students, also. It was an online
173 University and I had some experience in teaching online, right? We were using a program and I
174 think maybe we're moving towards them and from that experience in particular I had some
175 insights, and some experiences of how I can improve that. But this is much different, because I
176 didn't meet my students in person in the classroom, right? From... if I wanted to let's say, shift

177 all my... from what I did with my online classes and to what can we do right now? We can or the
178 system entirely, first of all, the system needs to provide a computer, I think, the system should
179 provide a computer and a connection. Because if I have to work with the computer that my
180 school gave to me, first of all, some schools don't get computers. Yeah, this is a really tiny screen
181 and I have some sight problems already with if I have to work so much time in the computer. Not
182 everybody is adapted or it's not the same. Technologies are good, but you have to be
183 comfortable.

184 **24:29** Comfortable means have good hardware also. The main point is that we all have the same
185 opportunities and what this made me realize is that I'm worried a little bit about that and I maybe
186 wasn't conscious about it before. Because sometimes we do like a class, and we say "Oh, well I
187 did my class and this is what I'm asking myself. Have I reach out to all my students why this and
188 this having understood or having worked." It doesn't matter if they didn't want, but now I'm
189 wondering: "what if I give that [assignment] to that student, and this student doesn't that it
190 doesn't do this." What's gonna happen next year? These students are going to be left behind, a
191 little bit at least. But this happened also in in the regular classes, right? This made me realize that
192 maybe I had to put more, I don't know, intention or ask things another way, or maybe simplify
193 things, or maybe don't ask for so many things for sometimes it's like, well it's hard to reach out.
194 Well I have like 20, 23, 25 students per class, which is not much, which is not much.

195 **26:09** I have had that before, in the previous years. Much more students in the class, but I think
196 the main thing is, apart from math, we have to make each student feel first of all very good, very
197 confident in themselves, that's the main focus: the main important thing for me confidence.
198 Confidence in themselves. To be sure that they can be whatever they can be, doesn't matter if
199 they're good at Math. Maybe the system is pushing so hard cause, I don't know, for example, I

200 had I had a WhatsApp message saying: “Well Math, English, whatever, is very good but, what is
201 What kids are really doing now is hand-crafts.” At the very beginning they were doing hand-
202 crafts and it's where they were very happy. Doing hand crafts. Well now, we have to see a very
203 different scenario. At the very beginning, that's what kids enjoy doing, and I think the main,
204 important, the most important thing is, as people, every person should know what they can be,
205 what they want to be, in that particular moment. It doesn't mean they don't have to put an effort
206 in what they are doing right now, but I think more in a holistic education, involving feelings,
207 **28:01** which is already starting to do in primary school and a little bit in secondary school. This
208 is why I understand my self-confidence: not only around the subjects, right? But in life. How are
209 we going to learn from that? Well I think we have already learned and this is a big opportunity
210 for me personally. It's a big opportunity to change and do work myself and to work with my
211 family members, of our relationships. And I think this is going to help us, for example, in my
212 school also to consider: “Well maybe we're doing things the best we can and to respect each
213 other a little bit more, in the sense that I'm not so important.” I can be here and the next day...
214 because of a virus right now... this will help many people to understand that life is... there's a
215 start and there's an end. And many people don't think about the end of life but this is a big
216 opportunity and also to consider what really what are really important things in our lives. This is,
217 I think, this is as all the things in life this is it has positive or negative aspects, and I try to focus
218 on positive aspects these two are the main beneficial aspects that this complete Covid19 has for
219 me up until now.

220 **29:59 Gutiérrez** That's wonderful. That's wonderful Frances. Not bad for a math teacher!
221 You wouldn't expect these sort of philosophical thoughts? But I enough of you to be appreciative
222 of your emphasis on the need for us to be happy as humans, no matter what's our walk of life or

223 where we leave so I appreciate that. Ok Francesc. Unfortunately, I'm going to have to bring the
224 clip to a closure. But I want to thank you for the time. I want to send to you *una abracada* (big
225 hugh)...

226 **30:35 Reverter** Okay! thank you very much.

227 **30:37 Gutiérrez** ...from California and wish you the best to your family. Hopefully will be
228 out of here we'll be out of this situation sooner than later, and we'll go back to our ways of doing
229 things, hopefully having learned something about this. And your reflection very well shows that
230 we can learn from these simple and then enhance what we're going later on for the benefit of our
231 kids in the next generation...

232 **[Music]**

233 **31:17 Reverter** One last thing if you have a minute. I am more or less happy with the
234 situation because I could give the appropriate time to my family, I think, but for example my
235 wife is working much than me much more than me, and I don't know what will happen in the
236 future but this is also not opportunity. Do I have to work so much? do I need the money? do I
237 need to spend so much time working? And this is also - what will happen in the future
238 maybe things we have maybe we have to school to consider less work because more time in
239 school doesn't mean you learn more. Right? Less work and more focus on the important things in
240 our subjects also.

241 **32:16 Gutiérrez** I love it!