

California State University, Monterey Bay



Oral History Interviews

*Digital Proximities*  
*Covid19 and the transformation of pedagogical practices*

The Big Shift: An Opportunity to Reimagine Teaching around Care, Safety  
and Education

Interview with  
Krista McAtee  
Recorded on April 13, 2020

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Digital Proximities 006 McAtee

Krista McAtee

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1 **00:00** [Music]

2 **00:07 Gutiérrez** *Krysta thank you so much for taking the time to spend this moment with*  
3 *me, recording a little bit of your experience with what's going on with Covid19 in your neck of*  
4 *the forest. So, that those that are going to be looking at this watching this clip, but know who you*  
5 *are in. What's your institutional context? Could you give us a little bit of that information?*

6 **00:29 McAtee** Yeah, I do I have two roles. One of my hats is teaching at Sonoma State  
7 University, teaching Elementary Math Methods as an adjunct professor for five years, and my  
8 other role is a Director of Mentoring for the North Bay for an organization called Trellis  
9 Education. Trellis is an organization that is committed to growing exceptional STEM teachers,  
10 so that every middle school and high school teacher student has access to exceptional STEM  
11 teachers. We particularly are thinking about STEM teaching as an act of social justice, and that  
12 everything we do in a STEM classroom, and I would say classroom, is an act of social justice, or  
13 an act of social injustice. So, how are we teaching in ways that disrupt racist patterns that we that  
14 are just innate in our society and our systems, and we support with universities and districts. We  
15 support STEM teachers from their pre-service year, as soon as they apply to their credential  
16 program, and are accepted, all the way through their fifth year of teaching. Because we know the  
17 majority of (50 percent) of teachers leave the profession in the first five years. We also work in  
18 only schools that have a majority population that have traditionally underserved students. So  
19 students of color, students with economic hardship situations, and we and we work with

20 universities. We have four university partners: San Francisco State, UC Berkeley, Sonoma State  
21 and Cal State East Bay, and then thirteen districts I think right now...

22 **02:19 Gutiérrez** *How's your organization funded?*

23 **02:23 McAtee** Grants at this point, but we also have partnerships with districts, and we're  
24 very involved in the California residency program. We have partners with four different  
25 California residency grants, so, and then we're doing a lot of the helping with some of the  
26 facilitation of that program. And then, one of the things, for example, a pre-service teacher like  
27 their track their course, they would have a mentor teacher, who's highly qualified, who is  
28 working at a Summer Institute, and monthly meetings looking at their own mentoring, and how  
29 their mentoring to push equity and social justice in the teaching of their teachers scholar, and  
30 we're doing that in affinity spaces. With people of color, and white folks, and then also in  
31 regional spaces. North Bay, East Bay in San Francisco, and so that's the pre-service here and  
32 then they're first in second year. Their induction mentors are also then Trellis mentors, so that  
33 they are supported all the way through induction. And their first year, when they're hired in a  
34 district that is a partner with us, they're hired at a hundred percent, but they only teach four  
35 classes. So they're fifth class they can co-plan, they can go observe, they can reflect... [exhales]  
36 they can catch a breath. So. and then in their third year we support them with getting their  
37 masters and then the National Board Certification person.

38 **03:55 Gutiérrez** *That's fantastic, having that fifth course release time available. In the*  
39 *middle of this practice, and workshops, and conversations, and training, Covid19 appears in our*  
40 *lives. So, what was your experience like? When did you learn? Did you see it coming? Were you*  
41 *prepared when it hit big time?*

42 **04:16 McAtee** Well, I think, I don't think any of us were prepared in any way. I think...  
43 What you know, we were hearing from different schools and different districts across the Bay  
44 Area, how they were, like San Francisco, for example, I think had Shelter In Place before the  
45 North Bay did, and so, we just kind of watched different communities. My role was talking to  
46 first and the second-year teachers, or pre-service teachers, right away. Like: "Okay, what does  
47 this mean for me? If I can't go to school on Monday or tomorrow or whatever..." So, lots of like  
48 instances, I would say, for sure.

49 **05:10 Gutiérrez** *So at a certain point in time, you had to stay in place, and the rest of your*  
50 *co-workers too, imagine?*

51 **05:15 McAtee** Yeah, I mean, I think what we did is, we decided we really kind of quickly  
52 like the leadership came down together and started thinking about What does it mean to be  
53 Mission Aligned? What's our mission? What does it mean to stay Mission Aligned in this time?  
54 And therefore like what do we value most to so we did a lot of work on values, and so What does  
55 that mean that we're committed to? So, I think, you know, there were a million different  
56 messages to teachers, and to mentor teachers and to pre-service teachers about what they needed  
57 to do, and you know, so lots of different messages from districts: Districts saying this and then  
58 the next day saying this and that, you know, and we were like: "Okay. We want to like take a  
59 breath and really come to center and like what matters the most here?" So, we were really, have  
60 worked hard at coming up with a list of values and commitments that were about like the first  
61 one was We're about, you know, personal helps. Everyone you know, everyone safety food,  
62 having food resources. Who? you know, who in our community is at risk for any of those things?  
63 First of all, and helping find and meet needs or support people in meeting those needs which  
64 means not creating a Google classroom right away, but making sure that we call and contact and

65 actually talk to every student. But it's actually not okay to teach a class online if you are missing  
66 20% of your students or even 15% but that's actually unjust and not okay and so helping teachers  
67 recognize, really, what do we value? So, first, physical emotional safety. Second that relationship  
68 is way important, more important than content, that connecting is crucial and then, third that we  
69 want to elevate witness support to those families who are, you know, particularly underserved.  
70 And often more vulnerable in our society. So, that's the priority.

71 **07:46 Gutiérrez** *This is the reason why I really wanted to get your perspective. In the midst*  
72 *of most of the interviews, our interviews are with educators that are in the classroom, but you're*  
73 *really looking at the big picture here one of the things that we're facing every day is that not all*  
74 *of the students that we have sent out with this idea that we just do a new modality, our students*  
75 *that are going to be facing hardship and access problems all kinds of things this morning I was*  
76 *talking to one student who lives in a rural community. She didn't have the internet so fortunately*  
77 *there was there is an association on campus that provided access now she's behind you're*  
78 *working with them. But what you were saying is interesting and I want you to expand a little bit*  
79 *on it so faculty would feel institutional pressure. Institutions, and rightly so, want to make sure*  
80 *that our business of educating continues and no matter what because that's what justifies our*  
81 *existence as an institution right so we have that pressure you need to continue teaching you need*  
82 *to continue interacting and you have 80 or 100 students that are having access no problem sure*  
83 *should I stop providing that access to the 80 students because we had 20 students that do not*  
84 *have access? Or, is it okay if I just do my best to make sure that those 20 have an alternative way*  
85 *of accessing? What would you say to a professor that is facing that institutional pressure?*

86 **09:24 McAtee** I mean I think that if we teach to 80% of our students. And I have, in our  
87 community I've had people, say, I have you know 10 to 15% of my students showing up and I've

88 had people saying I have 60% so it's all over the map. But regardless, that percent that isn't  
89 showing up, those are the ones that we should be reaching out to, those are the ones that we  
90 should be prioritizing. And I'm and I'm not I'm not saying you know like ignore the 80% that are  
91 showing up, but I'm saying this is an opportunity for us to repurpose reimagine education and  
92 maybe it's not, you know, I teach Math Methods, I believe it's important. Math is important. And  
93 people are more important, and people's hearts are more important, and people's emotional  
94 stability, because they are kids. There are there are people who I've spoken to in their Masters  
95 courses. They are more like "I can't read this article right now, I can't" you know, and then, we're  
96 going to expect students to do that? So, how we. Maybe, maybe, what we're teaching right now,  
97 needs to be completely different maybe we need to be teaching emotional resilience maybe we  
98 need to be teaching emotional resilience, maybe we need to be teaching how to connect, how to  
99 be vulnerable, how to be authentic, how to be a citizen within a home, or whatever, The theme is  
100 like maybe it's completely different, and maybe this is our opportunity instead of trying to  
101 swoosh content into a new box, in a new window. Or we can't. And they don't have access, so  
102 we're going to print it out, and give kids packets. This is not quality education! Like, this is our  
103 opportunity to totally stop, and even as an organization, where we say: "Here's our values, we  
104 value connectedness." It's easy for us even in this time to get caught up in, "oh my gosh what are  
105 we doing"

106 **11:36 Gutiérrez** *So, Krista, if I'm one of these instructors that are facing these institutional*  
107 *pressures. And I understand they're administrators, they have also obligations: fiscal*  
108 *obligations, and systemic obligations, they have to respond to. And they are telling me: "Yeah,*  
109 *we just need to switch modality. And I'm seeing, as you are well saying, that some of this news*  
110 *will be definitely neglected and left behind on this what would be if you were in the shoes of the*

111 *instructor, how would you address your Dean, your Chair, your Administrator? and say you*  
112 *need to give me some room. How would you do that?*

113 **12:10 McAtee**       What I'm learning to do more and more lately, and what I hope to invite  
114 people to do is to really speak their truth. And, you know this is an opportunity to learn how to  
115 do that, and to support one another. I think part of my role at Trellis. And even at some stage,  
116 because I have a few students who are teaching while they're taking coursework, so they're like  
117 doing an intern model, or something. Giving them permission to know, to search their own heart  
118 and say actually you know, hey, it is not OK with me to teach to 80% of my students? And it's  
119 not okay for me to require content if kids are emotionally and physically in a space not available.  
120 I had a mentor, I had a long conversation with a mentor teacher on Friday, who, you know, the  
121 District is coming up with guidelines for requirements, and one of them is you have to have your  
122 video camera on. And you have to maintain eye contact. And he and I spoke for a long time  
123 about the injustice of that, you know, to require students to allow their classmates into their  
124 home, and their teachers into their home, you know. And on so many levels it's just not okay. It  
125 is invasive and I have a hard time looking at the screen for all that time. To tell kids: "you have  
126 to look at a screen" Not fair. And we all have different learning styles, you know, and it's an  
127 opportunity. The other thing I tell teachers, elementary teachers and our faculty, is like: "Nobody  
128 has the answers right now." This is the best time for us to say: "Wait, let's look at this," you  
129 know, and I mean, I've had conversation, it's really hard, conversations with folks saying, and  
130 you know, it is true, it's easier for me as a white person to say, actually we're slipping back into  
131 white supremacy conditioning. We're slipping back into ways that we've been conditioned.  
132 Power over, controlling kids, you know, things like that. And by, you know, setting these  
133 requirements, and what it, what if we shifted to some more transformative types of ways of being

134 with kids, where it was more about connection, more about empathy, more about compassion,  
135 more about collaborative learning, that, you know, like I think this is the opportunity. In my  
136 class, in my ethics class state, where I'm like so, you know: "let's create this together. You all,  
137 you know, you're in your 20s and I'm in my 40s and, you know, a lot more about technology, and  
138 work. None of us really know how to do this. So, let's figure this out together." Like what do you  
139 need right now and being able to ask students what their needs are. What a concept, what a  
140 concept! We have to know the answers, and the institutions need to know and, whatever, the  
141 principles, need to know and give it down to the instructor? Actually, maybe this is more about a  
142 collaborative community, where we're all learning from one another. Maybe this is the big shift.

143 **15:43 Gutiérrez** *Yes. The weight of even the way we label things, like shelter-in-place is*  
144 *just this assumption, speaking of privilege, that everyone has a shelter in place that you can go*  
145 *back to, and just be safe. And it's connected and everything is fine and dandy, but the reality is*  
146 *much more complex than that we know that. So, in terms of... I was talking to a professor in*  
147 *Catalonia in Spain, and another one in Mexico, and I found it really interesting. They, of course,*  
148 *were facing very similar challenges and one of the things that they were emphasizing was the*  
149 *need to continue the interaction with the students. They've used different strategies. How do you*  
150 *feel about that? What are the challenges -in terms of keeping the interaction- that you're facing?*  
151 *and What are you recommending to your teachers and instructors?*

152 **16:33 McAtee** Yeah. I have lots of friends, I bring groups to Nicaragua every year, her and do  
153 education stuff. So, I was speaking to this last Fall I was with a bunch of folks in in Peru, and  
154 Colombia, and Mexico and Nicaragua. And you know, the students don't have electricity, let  
155 alone you know a camera yeah, right. So that's a whole thing, and it makes me think to in some  
156 ways... it makes me wonder, how we think -and you know I've been in education for 20 years I



157 taught in a Spanish dual immersion school for 15 years- and let's go in high school. I love  
158 education, but somehow, we think education is the answer. And the only thing kids need during  
159 this time actually maybe being with families. When they, maybe, some freedom to connect with  
160 their siblings and their grandparents and their whatever is what they need. I think trying to -like I  
161 said before- trying to connect with every student or every person in our community, is crucial  
162 and important. And we've done things, like one of the things we noticed, is if I'm reaching out,  
163 like if I call all of my students. or and I don't hear back, or I send a message and I don't get back  
164 from some, some of them, I need to reflect on what does that say about my relationship with  
165 them. Their comfort with me. What I've done in the past to cultivate relationship and trust and  
166 then, maybe I need to reach out to somebody else in the community who has a different kind of  
167 relationship, or a better relationship, or they might feel more comfortable talking to, or whatever.  
168 So, it's an opportunity for a reflection, but also using different means, right? So, maybe we use  
169 some of all of those different technologies that kids are using, meet with them. Maybe we're  
170 using Instagram and, you know, whatever, like all the different things that they use. Maybe it's  
171 an opportunity for us to learn from them: "Okay, what's your platform that you use?" or even  
172 engaging students. "Hey, has anybody heard from Jose?" you know, like we haven't been able to  
173 get a hold of him. How, you know, can somebody else tell me how he's doing? and how what's  
174 the best way to get ahold of him? you know.

175 **19:12 Gutiérrez** *Meeting them where they are. Absolutely. I know you mentioned already*  
176 *this, but I think it'll be great if you can take us back to that perception because I think is critical.*  
177 *As soon as they crisis hit, you brought together your leadership team and you thought about your*  
178 *priorities. Would you mind going back to that point and just elaborate a little more. What were*  
179 *the priorities that you identified as central in the process?*

180 **19:42 McAtee** We looked at our mission statement which I should I'll pull it up so that I  
181 can make sure that I'm saying it really well. I mean our mission is around growing and  
182 supporting exceptional pre-service middle school and high school teachers in California. So that  
183 every student has access to high quality education. So, we decided to look at what is it what does  
184 this mean and during this time. Because it looks different when we're all in the classroom. So we  
185 got together and we kind of listed our values and wordsmith on them and it took us a week.  
186 You'd like really to spend time like with partners, and then whole group, and back and forth and  
187 really looked at what do we value. What does it mean to be mission aligned and vision applying  
188 during school closures? And so far, first was addressing issues of access to basic human needs.  
189 First and foremost, that's the most important. If we have students who are not getting food, or  
190 who are worried about shelter, they need support on that level. First. Before they can begin to  
191 think about content, we can't we can't even I can't think about content if I'm not worried if I don't  
192 know what you know oh I'm going to pay my housing this month, forget it. Then the second  
193 piece is connection before content. So, making sure that we are connecting with every single  
194 student or every, you know, every single member of our community. And I think that connection  
195 is not just... what we've noticed, is it's not just reaching out and, you know, "how are you  
196 doing?" And if they don't reply, forget it. Actually, it means continuing you know we made a list  
197 of a database of everybody in our community. And if I tried to connect to somebody and still  
198 didn't hear back, then maybe I don't have the relationship that's right to connect to that person.  
199 And so, somebody else in our community can do that. And creating multiple ways to connect,  
200 you know. We had you know like I don't know happy hours. We had wide affinity spaces online,  
201 we had people of color affinity spaces, we had, you know, like: "What are the ways in which  
202 you're going to feel comfortable stepping in and talking about who you are?" So addressing

203 issues have access to you, means connection it also means yeah absolutely not creating the  
204 Google classroom for eighty percent of my students. Not going ahead with all the curriculum for  
205 70 percent of my students, or even 50 percent of my students. And then the third is, existing  
206 wisdom. Is we value the existing wisdom of our focal students and communities, and the  
207 opportunity to challenge the status quo. So, I say that again: existing wisdoms of our focal  
208 students. So, meaning, and our focus students are the students are traditionally underserved in  
209 our communities. We decide how we... what do we need to do to make education the most  
210 powerful for them. Valuing their existing wisdom, and the existing wisdom of their communities.  
211 And we value the opportunity to challenge the status quo. And then so, from those values, then  
212 we took a listing what does that mean? Okay. So, we commit to what and we came up, with a list  
213 of things of what that looks like.

214 **23:31 Gutiérrez** *So, when you, when you talk about challenging the status quo could you*  
215 *unpack that a little bit for us?*

216 **23:37 McAtee** Well, we know that our systems are built on white supremacy  
217 conditioning, and our systems are built to dehumanize some folks, and elevate other folks. And  
218 so, all the time in our classrooms, we talk about how do we notice which are the kids that have  
219 the value that are seen as academically higher, or whatever in our classrooms. Which of the kids  
220 that we want to acknowledge their competence in powerful ways? That reposition them, and that  
221 disrupts patterns of inequities that happen in our schools. So that's the way we go through all of  
222 the stuffs that we're doing. We're constantly looking at. Our goal is to change this gap in how  
223 students are valued and engaged and who's about, whose knowledge is valued, and whose  
224 contribution is valued and really shifts the dynamics that are that have been the part of our  
225 system for since the beginning. Absolutely oh so right now in this time of the crisis that gap is

226 even more profound and really more visible - every minute like the conversation is happening in  
227 their ways then it's happened in my educational experience in 25 years. So, this is our  
228 opportunity to really disrupt like this idea of I'm going to go ahead and teach even though 20%,  
229 and I've heard people say like: "How do I hold kids accountable?" And "I need to get those  
230 parents to get those kids." Yeah, some that... that comes from this paradigm of this level of  
231 privilege of not understanding kid is yeah and I've had people say: "Well I, you know things like  
232 I'm not sure what percentage of my students are not here." That should be the number one  
233 priority.

234 **25:49 Gutiérrez** *So, Krista in my experience, and I want to get your take on this, I've come*  
235 *across educators that would look at this narrative of making visible the gaps, and they would*  
236 *challenge that saying: "Yeah, but what that means in reality is that we're going to throw away*  
237 *standards. Do we keep the excellence of our institutions? How do we keep the standards? I will*  
238 *make sure that the students will be able to address the things that they will need to address when*  
239 *they hit the professional life. If we continue just looking at the gap and we're going to end up in*  
240 *a gap and the standard will go down the drain. So, in this concern for the standards, they would*  
241 *say: "Yeah, some kids could be left behind, that's the nature of the endeavor. But other than that,*  
242 *you will you not have excellence in education." What would you say to that?*

243 **26:45 McAtee** Okay so there I think I can I can think about a lot as, I don't know the  
244 answer now in this time. What I know at this time is that those priorities of relationship and  
245 human beings and those things those are those are more important to me than the content and I  
246 know we need to get to the content. But I think the only way maybe I can answer this question is  
247 like back up three months, because I yeah, I don't know the answer. How we're gonna do that at  
248 this time? But I would I would say, gosh you know, when I when I taught elementary school I

249 said please put all the kids with IDs in my classroom because I believe that they can access  
250 grade-level content. I don't want them pulled out of my classroom. I want them to be in my  
251 classroom and if you want to push in a Special Ed teacher to support them, that's fine, but I think  
252 we have this one way of understanding. So, for example in Math, what we believe about, you  
253 know, proficiency and memorization, and, you know, all of these things. And, in actuality, there  
254 are many ways to be mathematically brilliant. And in our culture, in our society, we value certain  
255 ways of doing that, and we totally devalue other ways of doing that. And I think we can create  
256 classroom communities in which all different ways of knowing are valued, and supported, and  
257 nurtured, and nourished. And that ways of knowing... I'll never forget: I had a GATE [*Gifted*  
258 *and Talented Program*] student. We had conferences and she said to her parent. She said: "Math  
259 is hard this year it's the first year math is hard." And her mom who was also the Special Ed  
260 teacher and who was pushed into my classroom said: "So, why is it hard?" She said, I have to  
261 like listen to other people and make sense of what they're doing and like I have to explain my  
262 thinking and you know, like I've never had to think like this before. And I had kids who came  
263 into that class, who were who were identified as RSV you know, with learning disabilities, and  
264 they came in, just hunched over, and thinking that they were stupid, because they've been taught  
265 by our system. These are ways of knowing and your ways of knowing are valued and within  
266 months those same kids would be saying: "You don't know let me explain it to you. I'll show  
267 you. Here. Let me take it you know..." Because if my goal in my classroom is to notice, and  
268 celebrate, and elevate all the different ways of knowing, I can help them recognize that there are  
269 ways of knowing that are valued and valuable and can push our collective understanding  
270 together. We just don't, we don't do that yet. We don't know how to do that in classrooms yet.

271 And so, we always have this conversation about the high kids and the low kids, or the kids right  
272 there, that's a that's all our creation. That's what we've created....

273 **30:07 Gutiérrez** *We're going to start running out of time you know time so before we get*  
274 *there I want to get a little bit of your perspective. So, I think, of course these are challenging*  
275 *times, weird times, unique times historically, unique times. And in every crisis one can see the*  
276 *problem, you can also see the opportunity. So, of the things that you're seeing are happening*  
277 *because of the Covid19 crisis, and the changes in strategies -and is sometimes scrambling to do*  
278 *things differently- what do you think we should retain of what what's working now for the future?*  
279 *You mentioned already it's an opportunity to challenge and to enhance what we're doing so,*  
280 *what do you think we can enhance based on this?*

281 **00:00 McAtee** Oh gosh, so many things. Two questions: what do we maintain and what  
282 do we enhance. I think we can't I've been I've been doing these visioning experiences with  
283 mentors and pre-service teachers, and first and second your teachers, where we just do kind a  
284 meditation, and we sink into a heart space. Just listen to our heart, and then, and I do this whole  
285 kind of breathing through your heart, and all this just really kind of centering into our deeper  
286 wisdom. And then I ask several questions. Five questions. And I have them rate the answers and  
287 then we share them together, and we're and the questions are really about, you know, like what if  
288 we just put aside everything we knew about education, and we got to completely reimagine it  
289 with no limits and no boundaries. What would that look like and feel like for you? And then,  
290 they just and then there's some silence, and everybody writes. And then the next question is, you  
291 know, what do I need to cultivate in my own self, in order to help facilitate that happening? What  
292 do I need to grow or allow to come through? And then we can take some time. And then the third  
293 question is something like: What type what past experiences or fears or whatever keep me stuck

294 in something else? What could I let go of? You know. Anyway, questions like that, and then we  
295 share, and so we're kind of creating together a new possibility, and viewing different people's  
296 ideas. I think about how we can... you know for me, kind of my vision is: I imagine classrooms  
297 in which each student recognizes their own brilliance, and their own wisdom, and their own  
298 wholeness, and is able to share that in the classroom and where students recognize the brilliance,  
299 and wisdom, and the wholeness of each other, and all completely different as the way in which I  
300 can grow together, that we can grow together like that's, that's, what I think could happen  
301 educationally. I mean anything could happen but what else... What if we completely... What if  
302 that was the goal, or something like that? That's my thing. That was it, and what if we're all  
303 working towards a place where you know my passion, every student's passion, gets to be  
304 cultivated and, you know, we spend so much time on deficits, I do not think we even know what  
305 their passion is. I know a lot of adults that don't know what their passions are. What if we  
306 practice see what brought life to our lives? You know?

307 **00:00 Gutiérrez** *It is fantastic Krista. We could be speaking for, I suspect, for another*  
308 *hour, solid hour. I really want to thank you for your time, for your wisdom, for your perspective,*  
309 *and I look forward to keeping track of what you and your organization are doing over there, so*  
310 *that we can learn and continue also enhancing our practice over here. Thanks a lot and my*  
311 *appreciation.*

312 **34:41 McAtee** Thank you.

313 [Music]