

California State University, Monterey Bay



Oral History Interviews

Digital Proximities
Covid19 and the transformation of pedagogical practices

The Other Side of the Moon

Interview with
Lona Lindstrøm Stephansen
Recorded on April 24, 2020

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Digital Proximities 009 Lindstrøm

Carmen Montecinos Sanhueza

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1 **00:00** [Music]

2 **00:10 Gutiérrez** ... *in three, two and let's get started. Lona Lindstrøm, I'm hoping that I'm*
3 *saying your last name correctly.*

4 **00:20 Lindstrøm** Yep.

5 **00:24 Gutiérrez** *Lindstrøm Stephansen, right?*

6 **00:25 Lindstrøm** Exactly.

7 **00:18 Gutiérrez** *Thank you, well thank you for taking the time and for sharing with the rest*
8 *of us a little bit of your experience in Denmark as to how you have lived this or you are living*
9 *these interesting times, you know. If I may, I would like to get to know a little bite about yourself*
10 *and your institutional context.*

11 **00:41 Lindstrøm** Yeah! Well, I teach at the University College at Northern Jutland,
12 Denmark, which is a University of Applied Science. And I teach in the bachelor's program, that
13 is Export Technology Management. And I teach Cultural Understanding, Communication,
14 Methodology, Theory of Science, and yeah, stuff like that. So that's mainly my [background].

15 **01:14 Gutiérrez** *Where is this at? What city are you on?*

16 **01:19 Lindstrøm** The city is all Aalborg, which is in the northern part of Denmark.
17 Denmark is very small, so it's actually just a city there...

18 **01:24 Gutiérrez** *At the very tip, right? You can see Norway from where you are?*

19 **01:34 Lindstrøm** On a very bright day! No, no, we can't, but we feel connected with
20 Norway.

21 **01:44 Gutiérrez** *Your students are mostly... I Denmark is a more, I believe is a more*
22 *homogeneous society, than other societies, but its middle-class, upper middle-class. What's the*
23 *social context of your student body?*

24 **02:02 Lindstrøm** Yeah. Denmark it's a bit, how do you say... straight in that sense, because
25 every, everyone gets paid to take an education. means we get students support and we don't have
26 to pay to go to college. Meaning, there's a lot of different types of people attending our classes.
27 But we also have international students in the program. I teach, which is relevant when we teach,
28 Export and Technology Management, so we benefit from the diversity in the class with both
29 Spain, Spanish, people and Danish people, and we also have Mexicans. Also, all types of
30 Chinese people, so that makes it easier to teach Cultural Understanding.

31 **03:02 Gutiérrez** *Yes. You know, whenever I have students from other countries in my*
32 *classroom, I love it, because it really brings perspective, and it forces everyone to think more*
33 *carefully about what we're going to say, and how. What the meaning of what we're saying is for*
34 *other folks, and it is really interesting. Unfortunately, we had to see most of our foreign students*
35 *leaving our campus. So, before I move into how you leave the experience I also meant to ask you*
36 *What is your training, your... What's your background, the disciplinary background? Are you a*
37 *social scientist?*

38 **03:38 Lindstrøm** Yeah communication that's my main, and I've had some social studies, and
39 actually also some cultural studies. I majored in in communication

40 **03:51 Gutiérrez** *Could you tell us a little bit how did this happen in Denmark? When did*
41 *you learn that this [pandemic] was becoming a major issue? When did the university closed all*
42 *together? How do you live this time?*

43 **04:01 Lindstrøm** As I recall it was around the 12th of March when we were sent home, all
44 of us in the public... what do you call it public? I'm in a public job, you know, so I'm hired by
45 the state. Which means that they could be... they just send everybody hired by the state home.
46 And then a week later, I was as, I recall, that on March 18th they closed everything. Or not
47 everything but very many things like the border was closed, and they were saying to the people:
48 "Get home, if you're Dane" and you're, you know, outside in the world. "Come back, and we'll
49 help you come back." So, the Foreign Ministry was, they were busy. Every, all the schools were
50 closed. All the Universities were closed, sent back but still the contractors is that what you call
51 them, and you have you know the building, construction sites were still open. So, carpenters and
52 all that we're still working and still there are some there were some factories going. They worked
53 but they were told to work as much from home as possible. An that means... I mean and very
54 fast everything was closing down meaning, even though you were had your manufacturing going
55 on, there were no orders so at very fast everything slowed so much down. So that they had just to
56 stop producing, manufacturing. Then the State got out and said: "We'll have this help packages"
57 What you call it in America?

58 **06:09 Gutiérrez** *You have to help, that want to help out financially, like money-wise.*

59 **06:20 Lindstrøm** Yes. So, the State was providing different packages for different types of
60 industries. So that they could send back send home their employees, but not close down the
61 factory. So that they would, they were sent home but with a salary.

62 **06:36 Gutiérrez** *Oh, interesting.*

63 **06:39 Lindstrøm** Yeah. So, the Danish government provided salary for the people sent
64 home so, what you call it? Well, if they didn't fire them.

65 **06:50 Gutiérrez** *So, okay, that makes sense. So, you keep the people employed but the*
66 *factories don't have to bear the brunt of the impact. Which is not what all countries have done.*
67 *Other countries, like in the US, people will get fired and then they apply for unemployment*
68 *benefits and then in addition of that regular unemployment benefits, the state will give them, the*
69 *Federation will give them a compliment. But people got fired so it's in the millions, so it's*
70 *different strategy.*

71 **07:35 Lindstrøm** I'm just... it's so interesting to follow the different strategies from the
72 different countries and it was quite... it was from one day to another that they said... Okay, our
73 Prime Minister Mette Fredriksen was like “okay, now we're closing this down: schools blah,
74 blah, blah. Go home, stay home, and do not go out if not necessary.” Hmm, but no, it wasn't you
75 couldn't get a fine ore anything, it was just like this is serious business. In Denmark we are used
76 to doing what the government tells us. Well as a culture teaches, it's quite it's quite interesting to
77 follow this, because, well, okay, the government says: “we like you know that it is going like
78 okay. We do this and we're used to and in our small country there's only one government. It's and
79 that sounds very easy to give one message to everybody.

80 **08:35 Gutiérrez** *So you are you are at your university... How many students do you*
81 *normally have?*

82 **08:37 Lindstrøm** Each class is around 30 students yeah like that and we have one ended in
83 this spring we have second, fourth and sixth semesters.

84 **08:54 Gutiérrez** *So you're one day teaching in the classroom and then, the next day, you*
85 *don't go. So, What do you do? How do you adjust to it? What's your experience like?*

86 **09:02 Lindstrøm** At first it was like a weird combination of... it is. I hate to admit it, but a
87 bit of a thrill. It's like, okay this is... uh, yeah. "Let's see what happens" combined with "oh my
88 god, this is horrible." And then, you know, going forth and back and all the time we speak to
89 people like: "this is really weird, yes, this is weird." And "How are we going to do this? And
90 how are we going to do that, and how we do this and that?" It was, I think, was Thursday when
91 the first message came, that we all are educators and all that we're going home and then we spent
92 all Friday finding out how to make a conference in an our --we had this platform called Canvas.
93 How to make a conference, how to make all these different things that were able in that our
94 platform, that was providing. We hadn't really used it that much before. So, we were really, you
95 know, taking courses to with each other and we're like trying to teach each other what we knew
96 and "do you know this? have you seen this? This is actually really nice, if you can do this. And
97 when we have supervision you can invite them in, and then it could put them in different rooms
98 and you can visit them differently and like..." yeah, cool. And you know taking notes and all
99 that prepared! Like to the teeth! For Monday morning, when everything is expected. Yes. We
100 were like oh, okay. I'm setting up this and ready to take off and then everything breaks down!
101 Seriously, literally, *everything* breaks down. yes, and it was our VPN, you know, we couldn't
102 access anything. I couldn't access my email, that the instruments were very unstable and it
103 actually showed that or if they found out it was a data provider in Germany, who had difficulties
104 meaning, all was you know gone!

105 **11:04 Gutiérrez** *For a long time? How long did it take...*

106 **11:08 Lindstrøm** The whole Monday. Until the afternoon. And the students were horrified
107 because they thought we forgot them. There was just silence. We couldn't communicate with
108 them. We had nothing. I couldn't even call from my phone, yeah, so that was just a wake-up call

109 from, you know from somewhere you didn't know existed. If anybody wants to hurt us, right
110 now, just you know just cut the line.

111 **11:40 Gutiérrez** *We're so dependent, right, so, who's teaching you how to use the system on*
112 *Friday is it amongst your colleagues or do you have a system in place?*

113 **11:52 Lindstrøm** We have some consultants hired internally. So, we have those people
114 connected internally and they were busy. They were, very busy. The good thing about them was
115 that they had most all prepared everything prepared online so, they could just talk and play. Yeah
116 that was good. Unfortunately, canvas cannot... they... the platform that we normally use, cannot
117 take as that many students at a time. Yes. We have had to... we had turnover to Teams instead.

118 **12:29 Gutiérrez** *So, what is an online session like for you? because you have to replace*
119 *your lecture. You have to replace your interaction. What is that like for you?*

120 **12:33 Lindstrøm** You are asking me how I feel or what the know the mechanics?

121 **12:51 Gutiérrez** *Because I can see in your face how you feel, what are you doing?*

122 **12:58 Lindstrøm** So, first I thought that I should replace, you know, or just do what I
123 normally do in the classroom, and do that online. So, I tried to do the same things in the online
124 classroom that I would do interacting with the students in the class. Didn't work! Yeah, mmm,
125 didn't work at all. I just had silence, you know. Now that you and I speak together, now I have a
126 feeling that we have a conversation. I've actually felt that it's nice, to be with you, here. Even
127 though we're so many miles away from each other, right? huh I felt even though some of them
128 might sit just a few blocks from here! Yeah, I felt that they were on the other side of the Moon!
129 There was nothing. They didn't interact they didn't know how to. I mean, they were not used to
130 this, so they were just silent. They muted their microphones. I was like... Is anybody out there?...

131 **13:47 Gutiérrez** *So, they just muted their mics.*

132 **13:53 Lindstrøm** Yeah. So, and that's, I mean, they have never been used to this before.
133 Normally, if I do anything digital I would be... I would record like a session and then put it up
134 and they just watch me. And then do some assignments in the class, yeah together, with me
135 afterwards. Now, this is like I'm dependent on that either we have a discussion -actually where
136 people actually discuss- and if I really dragged them, they will maybe put a sting in the chats,
137 just you know very shy: "So, I have a question anyways..." Its just me! Just tell me! Anyways.
138 Then having recognized that was not going well, the next thing I did was, and that is actually
139 much better for me, at least I don't know it works for everybody, with that for me it's better. I
140 actually structured in a way that I had a whole week course with about a visual presentation. I
141 was like this should be a workshop when I go around and talk to the groups. When they see what
142 they work and work with them so how can I do that online? So, I made a lot of different tasks
143 assignments saying: "Now you have to determine what the target group is. Now you have to find
144 out what the message is. Now you have to find the objective level." All these different things that
145 I suggest them or that I expect them to go through and I had to write everything out, you know,
146 in small details. This is what you have to do.

147 **15:31 Gutiérrez** *So, step by step, so that they are not lost. You know when, you don't have*
148 *time to prepare, then it makes for really long busy days, right?*

149 **15:38 Lindstrøm** Yeah, but what my colleague said, the good thing is next year it's just you
150 know copy-paste. You can do it in the classroom and smile or not,

151 **15:49 Gutiérrez** *Yeah, maybe. So I was going to ask you that, you know: We're hoping that*
152 *first of all, we're all hopeful that some brilliant genius will find a vaccine and then the test goes*
153 *fast but the reality is that we might find ourselves not opening universities for the Fall, so in that*
154 *sort of the big question that I think we all are facing so How do we make sure that we stay*

155 *connected with students? that we are delivering something of quality? that we keep attaining*
156 *outcomes? How do you feel about that perspective? The perspective that your university was*
157 *note open during the Fall?*

158 **16:30 Lindstrøm** First of all very sad, because I miss the students very much, I miss my
159 colleagues, I miss the interaction, I miss the inspiration... I miss everything. Then, when I have
160 to know “okay back on track” this is the reality, we have to face it. Then I see that if I can
161 translate, I need to do some translation every time, but as long as I do that translated from real
162 reality to virtual, or this different reality, and not just doing what I used to I have to have, then
163 some new habits. And we have to discuss them in our team, as new things that we, do like this
164 instead of trying to reproduce what we normally do.

165 **17:21** That I think that's the I have to say, that actually this last week, I was this new course that
166 I did with the visual presentation. I was talking about I could see that, okay they did the task, I
167 could give them feedback in, you know, in a discussion like this, with a small group instead of
168 the whole class. They feel comfortable I can see I there they're better, you know, and then they
169 put on their camera and I can see them, and we can have a discussion. Like five or six people is
170 much more... easier to have a conference like this. And then give feedback. And that's a new
171 way of thinking for me, instead of having them work and the progress and I'd say I would
172 normally say that: “don't worry you get there, you're in the process... blah, blah...” about all that.
173 No, this is a task. I have to soften and I give you feedback on that.

174 **18:15** I mean, I'm worried about... if we don't, if you say this how can we keep the contact and
175 in touch with the students? I'm worried about those students, who not just mute their
176 microphone but also mute their life, so to speak. They don't interact, or they are not proactive in
177 the way they would be if I could see them in the class. And I can see they may be sad: “don't

178 worry” or something I would go to them saying “hey are you okay?” I can't do that, so that's the
 179 only thing that's my worry. But I actually have something called *reflection conversations* in our
 180 program, where each class has its own contact teacher. So, that means I have, I have for now
 181 they it's they're called fourth semester, so I'm contact teacher for them, and each of the students
 182 have a conversation with me. I actually did it online this time, because we were in the Covid
 183 situation here. So, and that is helpful because then I could clearly see that there was four students
 184 that I didn't get in contact with, and they are, they were... I, you know, had to call them for
 185 several times.

186 **19:49** And that's still one student we haven't and then this you know then we can send out a
 187 caring email saying: “hey, we can see that you're not is there anything you know mmm-hmm?
 188 But I mean note all and not everybody, not all the programs. In UTM has the same yeah,

189 **20:06 Gutiérrez** *And, of course, when you have, and we do have groups of similar size, and*
 190 *they were and... I'm perceiving you do have, but in some other universities when you have a*
 191 *classroom with 300 students, 800 students, then there is just a whole different ballgame. But*
 192 *anyway. So, before we run out of time, because as I mentioned these are short clips and this is*
 193 *lovely. We could be talking for an hour I suspect. I just wanted to ask you, just placing a little bit*
 194 *of perspective to these: What are the things that you have learned of your teaching, of your*
 195 *students, of your institution that you didn't know? Because this is putting everything upside*
 196 *down, and maybe there are things that you, that have new value, that we didn't see before, that*
 197 *we want to keep. Maybe there's things that we definitely need to go back to, like you were saying*
 198 *“I miss my students.” How can the personal contact... how can you replace that with squares on*
 199 *our computer? So: What do we learn from this? What have you learned from this whole*
 200 *experience?*

201 **21:20 Lindstrøm** I have a strange feeling of that. For instance, this is the fact that you and I
202 are speaking right now, and you know having a bigger perspective in that we are actually in the
203 same, we're in the same situation all over the world. Sitting here talking to a screen... And I don't
204 think ever in the history of this, you know, civilization, that we have tried that the whole globe at
205 the same time is experiencing the same. So, for me, I feel a strange connection to the world. At
206 the same time, I feel very, you know, yeah... what you call it?...

207 **22:16 Gutiérrez** *Isolated? Confined?*

208 **22:22 Lindstrøm** Yeah... but I'm, I'm very inspired also by what you're doing right now,
209 that this is really easy. We could do this all the time, and then that's maybe harder when you run
210 around in the school, and like look at people in the eyes! Which we, of course, we miss. That, but
211 still this... this also has value right. Then, yeah, that we're actually able to sit here and contact
212 people on the other side of the world, and have a very interesting discussion about how do we
213 actually... What do we learn from this? So, I don't know, but there's some low practical things
214 with my educational stuff, you know things that I do in my teaching that I'm definitely going to
215 apply afterwards. Like structure, for instance, which it's not my strong side, but I have to, I mean,
216 it works when I'm structured. So, that's something that I have to be: I have to be structured when
217 I work, like online, but that's very practical at some very low practical stuff that but I don't know
218 fire yeah.

219 **23:32 Gutiérrez** *Well you had one day to prepare right?! That's amazing-crazy.*

220 *Lone Lindstrøm, thank you thank you so much for your time. I wish you the best from here.*

221 *Please know that we are not injecting like light or bleach in our veins in the US. That's not*

222 *happening... with we're not crazy! But I want to wish you the best in the opening of the country. I*

223 *hope it brings back the country online and it gives us a sense of how to do things because all*

224 *nations are trying to open up again and I can see their frustration and I can feel like their*
225 *necessity... We're just so dependent on things going quickly... wishing you be the best*
226 *Thank you for your time, and I hope we, this allows us to stay in touch and not only openness*
227 *and communication.*

228 **24:25 Lindstrøm** Definitely, I'd really love that. So, thank you very much for asking

229 **24:31 Gutiérrez** *Thank you Lone...*

230 [Music]