

California State University, Monterey Bay



Oral History Interviews

Digital Proximities
Covid19 and the transformation of pedagogical practices

Interview with
Carmen Montecinos Sanhueza
Recorded on April 29, 2020

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Digital Proximities **011 Montecinos**

Carmen Montecinos Sanhueza

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1 **00:00** [Music]

2 **00:11 Gutiérrez** *Carmen Montecinos Sanhueza. Thank you so much for taking the time I*

3 *know these are interesting difficult days for all of us.*

4 *As I was sharing with you the intention of this archive is just to keep a record of our emotions*

5 *feelings thoughts as the Covid 19 crisis is unfolding.*

6 *So, thank you for your time. I wanted to first ask you to please tell us a little bit about your*

7 *background so those that are not familiar with your work become familiar with some of it. Where*

8 *are you at? You are in Valparaiso, wonderful Valparaiso, right?*

9 **00:55 Montecinos** Yes, well actually I live in a small town north of Valparaiso. It used to be

10 a little fishing village and then, over time it became sort of a commuter town for people who

11 work in Valparaiso and Viña del Mar which are neighboring cities. I work in Valparaiso but I

12 live 15 kilometers north of Valparaiso.

13 **01:34 Gutiérrez** *Very nice. Sounds like the true Paraiso*

14 **01:36 Montecinos** Instead of having the camera looking at me, I should have the camera

15 pointing at the ocean view. I have a beautiful view of the ocean and then Valparaiso is on the

16 back. It is a bay so I can see Valparaiso behind.

17 **01:57 Gutiérrez** *It eases the pain of the confinement, I suppose. What are you working on?*

18 *I know you are the director for Líderes Educativos...*

19 **02:02 Montecinos** Well, actually it's interesting because I, for many, many years I've worked
20 in teacher education and I did quite a bit of work looking at how to best prepare teachers to work
21 and serve children who are most disenfranchised due to economic exclusion or race
22 discrimination, inequities in general. And in doing that work I realized that the school principals
23 were key to creating conditions for teachers to engage in equity education, so I ended up, sort of,
24 over the years working more with principals and school leaders in general and teacher leaders as
25 sort of a stage in which the work that we do at the University preparing teachers must be
26 conducive to equity education.

27 So, right now I'm directing a center which is funded by a government grant and it's a consortium
28 of for institutions to prepare leaders for schools. We are we're working with school leaders, with
29 district level leaders and we' are working leadership networks with the idea of equipping school
30 leaders and system level leaders with tools to create conditions for equitable learning.

31 **30:54 Gutiérrez** *Absolutely yeah and just thinking what you just said how important it is to*
32 *help the correct structure in support for teachers so if you don't have that then the teachers can*
33 *be magnificent but then education is not going to be the same. Working with the directors with*
34 *the principals that makes a lot of sense. So, Carmen, before the crisis hits you're you're, I*
35 *imagine, giving workshops working with instructors I don't know that you're doing also*
36 *instruction in the classroom with students at the University?*

37 **04:37 Montecinos** I'm a professor of psychology and work with undergraduate psychology
38 students. In Chile when you go to the University you become a licensed psychologist so it's
39 really professional preparation and I was working with them in the area of educational
40 psychology and mostly we were in working with them to be able to support teachers and
41 understand what happens in the classroom because you know creating interdisciplinary work in

42 schools is very important. You know, one of the things that we know is that children come to
43 school whole and part of their lives may not be conducive to their learning, so expecting teachers
44 to be able to be social workers, psychologists and so forth ,you know, it's not going to work. So,
45 teachers can really focus on their job, which is to help kids learn, they need to also be supported
46 by other professionals. So, I work developing psychologists who are able to understand the
47 classroom from the perspective of the teachers and then help teachers meet their goals rather than
48 thinking that the problem is in the kid and they have to pull the kid out and fix the kid. But it's
49 really understanding the ecology in the classroom.

50 **6:08 Gutiérrez** *Mid-March that's when you're going to lock down in Chile. How did the*
51 *whole crisis unfold in Chile?*

52 **6:10 Montecinos** Actually, it was my birthday. The day I turned 65 is when all hell broke
53 loose is what you would say and so I was like “wow you know I enter like the senior citizen
54 phase and that’s what happens”. There is a perk, because you know at the beginning they said:
55 *okay people who are 65 and older have to stay home.* So, I was able to stay home. In the
56 beginning even right now, in terms of where I live, it it's not mandatory lockdown. In other parts
57 of Chile, it is mandatory. But then schools were canceled because parents were afraid to send
58 their kids to school. There's also a liability. I mean if all of these people get sick at the
59 universities so the university cancelled classes and told us to stay home just because it was, to
60 comply with the government's request for social distancing and all that. So, pretty much the last
61 time I went to work was as I say the day of my birthday when I had to go home, so I've been at
62 home since.

63 **7:42 Gutiérrez** *A day to remember*

64 **7:44 Montecinos** I won't forget.

65 **7:51 Gutiérrez** *How is education doing in Chile these days? Are things stopped and idle*
66 *or have people been able to continue training students?*

67 **8:05 Montecinos** Quite interesting because at the beginning it was like a few days, a few
68 weeks I would say that nothing was happening and then the government started to say they we're
69 going to online classes, so they were going to develop all kinds of resources for teachers to do
70 online classes. And quickly it was realized that the inequities are there, so the kids who were able
71 to use all these platforms and all the social media, and work remotely, were the kids who came
72 from middle class or affluent families and not children who lived in the shanty towns, who lived
73 in very crowded conditions. They couldn't do it and even if they had a computer, if you had five
74 kids, they couldn't all be in class at the same time, so in order for this to really work a family
75 needed everybody with their own computer, because a parent, at the same time, was working
76 remotely on their computer so it became a mess. The government then decided that to put the
77 schools on winter break, so they went for a two-weeks on break. This,, with the idea that when
78 schools restart we wouldn't have to stop for winter break, but it would continue through the year.
79 And it's been very difficult because, on the one hand, you have the difficulties of ensuring that
80 everybody access the online on the other hand, public schools in Chile depend on the municipal
81 Department of Education, so every municipal department also had different capabilities for
82 supporting the schools and the teachers. In some areas the municipality is very proactive
83 teaching, actually working remotely... they held meetings, and so forth. But in other areas,
84 nobody answers the phone when you call and there's nobody there because they are remote
85 towns. So, some schools have been better able to provide what the government is offering and
86 some teachers are have been able to commit themselves to doing this.

87 But what's interesting is that at the university level, all universities in Chile went online, so we
88 are doing online classes. Students, you know, university students in Chile they're very politically
89 active. They went on strike so we have an online strike. Because students are actually
90 complaining about this inequity. If students have children at home you can't really say to the kids
91 okay you get out of the way I have to study now, so these are the challenges that students are
92 facing to access. Universities have giving out computers, they are giving access to lmobile so
93 everybody can access, but even then, students are complaining that this is not fair and they're
94 asking that they should not be charged tuition because they're not getting what they're paying for.
95 And this is big thing also with the private sector as about seven percent of students go to private
96 schools. Parents of these private schools are also complaining that they should not pay the fee
97 and then the schools' respond, well but if you don't pay, then we have to layoff teachers. So
98 there's all this chain of events. So the whole question of how to provide education is really
99 crossed by class by socioeconomic status, also by rights and responsibilities and by political
100 activism..

101 **12:26 Gutiérrez** *Very complex and Chile was having a difficult year, right? The past year*
102 *and this year were a little bit more difficult than years past in terms of social unrest?*

103 **12:38 Montecinos** Yeah, we had a terrible social unrest that started October 18th and it was
104 interesting because it was when classes were first suspended because it was just dangerous to be
105 on the streets, there was too much rioting and, you know, and clashes with police. It was really
106 terrifying. I was caught in a public transportation and the people on the streets were throwing
107 stones at the bus and the driver was trying to avoid them, and then came the water cannon and
108 we were kind of caught in the middle. So, going out was very dangerous.

109 Actually, I was more stressed about that than about this because I think I have more control here
110 because now I stay home and I know how to take care myself but at that time it was a very
111 stressful end of the year. Many universities, because students were on strike through the social
112 unrest, couldn't finish the second semester of 2019m so they were starting 2020 to finish 2019
113 online. So some university have not been able to start their academic year of 2020 which starts
114 usually in March because they're completing the previous academic year because of the social
115 unrest. It's been a very difficult situation. In fact, many public schools are saying, that last year
116 on average they probably had maybe four months of classes. The rest of the time was lost and
117 wasted in riots and strikes and so forth.

118 **14:27 Gutiérrez** *So, actually, Covid 19 is actually is just making it even more so complex a*
119 *situation that was a really difficult ride for teachers and students*

120 **14:37 Montecinos** Yeah, it has. But I think it is sort of interesting because on the one hand
121 you know the government didn't really have a good handle on how to deal with the riots and
122 social unrest. I mean, people really lost trust in the government; lost trust in the police, lost trust
123 in the legislature etc. But from my perspective and I think there's a certain consensus by a large
124 majority that our government has been very skillful in managing the pandemic, we have had very
125 few deaths and spread.

126 **15:18 Gutiérrez** *Yeah, the numbers are excellent compared to other countries, really*
127 *enviable.*

128 **15:21 Montecinos** So that has restored sort of some confidence in the government. To what
129 extent that confidence will spill into confidence about the social unrest and the inequities that
130 gave rise to the riots remains a question. In fact ,I was reading in the news that the social unrest
131 started again, so about a week ago people are again going out to the street and rioting and

132 destroying property and looting and fires and so there's being clashes with the police,. It's seems
133 like there's a concern that after the social distancing measures are lifted there will be more unrest
134 because people, a lot of people are going without, hungry. And a lot of layoffs, unemployment in
135 an informal labor market so a lot of people who sell three lettuces on a corner in the street in the
136 hopes that they can make enough money to buy some food for the day, and then the next day
137 three more lettuces, otherwise they don't eat.

138 **16:47 Gutiérrez** *Yes. I was going to ask you so in terms of the students and teachers that*
139 *you have contact with, emotionally they have to be in a in a difficult spot right now, and how do*
140 *you gauge the emotions that are out there among educators?*

141 **17:07 Montecinos** Well I think what's interesting is that the teachers, you know, some of
142 them, again it has to do with leadership and with opportunities that are created, are trying to be
143 very creative and are very willing to share what they're doing, so there's a lot of solidarity in
144 terms of helping each other cope with resources, that's good. But, on the other hand, you have the
145 teacher's union that is completely saying we're not going to be part of this, you know now. And
146 so even if the government wants to go back to school and open schools, the teachers' union is
147 saying that we're not going to go back, because it's not safe.. On the one hand, you have sort of
148 the Union, the Teacher's Union saying: "we're not going to be part of whatever the government
149 decides to go back if that it's not safe," but, on the other hand, you have teachers in their specific
150 communities trying to serve kids. For example teachers have what's called the ethical shift. So
151 basically once a week they go to the school to serve food for kids because a lot of children in
152 public schools get their meals at school so they have to go to school. They also go to school to
153 provide resources for children who cannot access it, so teachers in many schools are working and
154 doing this ethical duty, to support kids on these other areas, in particular feeding them.

155 **19:31 Gutiérrez** *So, socially and you have you have a really complex scenario right with*
156 *multiple situations and economic difficulties that are going on so I can see how teachers play a*
157 *very important role any on that note the teachers are it seems to me that in Chile there was*
158 *already quite a bit of extended use of technologies for instruction right. Online is by no means*
159 *something foreign to teachers, so the transition right now to this moment maybe wasn't that*
160 *difficult or some?*

161 **20:13 Montecinos** Mmmhh. I don't know, because in Chile indeed we do have a long history
162 of developing technology in schools but they've tended to be more isolated. Like there's a
163 computer lab in the school, and kids will go to the computer lab, and work with teachers in
164 charge of that. It's not sort of embedded into everyday classroom instruction, and you will have
165 things like PowerPoint and some sort of that kind of thing but everyday classroom instruction
166 was not very digitalized. But the government has invested heavily in creating this kind of
167 resources. For example, the government has invested heavily in developing a professional
168 development courses for teachers. It is not very convenient because they have to do it outside of
169 their contract time, and many don't have the technological skills. So, even though the
170 infrastructure might be there, the culture it's not there,

171 **21:30 Gutiérrez** *Yes, and the instructor's conditions because you're saying "I'm done*
172 *teaching" and the last thing that I want to do is that. Maybe I need to go back home and engage*
173 *with my family... So you have a really interesting position in terms of knowing the educational*
174 *system in Chile and I meant to ask because we're going to be running out of time in a few*
175 *minutes and I really wanted to get your perspective: so it's kind of a two sided question on the*
176 *one hand is to get your perspective on what is this particular experience of closure of school*
177 *because of the time they mean what is this doing to education in Chile? it's going to be a*

178 *historical moment or before an act do you see new technologies emerging as an alternative for to*
179 *continue with the instruction so that's on the on the one hand right and then, secondly, your*
180 *perspective as to you know the conditions on the ground in Chile very well, obviously, and what*
181 *do you see the question would be what is the role that education is playing and they will continue*
182 *to play in in the future of Chile? It's a big question but but I know that Chile is facing this very*
183 *specific historical political in social moment right so I just wanted to get a little bit of your*
184 *perspective.*

185 **23:00 Montecinos** With respect to the first question, I'm hopeful that lessons will be learned,
186 and this challenge is an opportunity to rethink how we organize teachers work, for example. I've
187 been active in social media, helping principals think about what does it mean to return to the
188 new normal. A big part of what principals are supposed to do is what's called instructional
189 leadership, which is how they work to ensure that teachers teach well, and students learn, but
190 how do you do that in a virtual setting? I mean how do you provide? How do you do that? So, I
191 was reading and I was really surprised at all the resources that are out there for teachers and
192 pupils and parents. I haven't found really resources that will help principals or assistant principals
193 how to do instructional leadership in this context.

194 **24:22 Montecinos** I found one study that said this is really an unexplored area and most
195 principal preparation programs don't even address the question of how to monitor and ensure
196 high quality instruction online. Hopefully this is an opportunity to start thinking about what does
197 it mean to lead in a different kind of context, like the one you're talking about. I also think that
198 we know, it's well documented, that because opportunities to learn are so different depending on
199 the child's home that when you go back to school there's going to be tremendous variability and
200 diversity. In terms of this concern it is important to think about how to deploy the capacities that

201 exist in your schools to meet the needs of these different kids. I think that the idea each teacher
202 would continue doing what they were doing, is not going to work. I think teachers need to think
203 more strategically how to collaborate so that they don't get burned out.

204 Because it's going to be very stressful for teachers and the kids when school is restarted. I've
205 been sort of pushing the idea of how you take this opportunity to break away from some of the
206 things that we know don't work at school. We know that teacher isolation doesn't work at all, for
207 example when we have special education teachers in the schools and all they do is pull out the
208 kid to a resource room, that doesn't work. There is a need for greater collaboration. So how do
209 we organize, for example, special education teachers' work with a regular education teachers, so
210 that differentiated instruction becomes a norm in the school, and not an exception. I think of
211 those opportunities but I'm not sure how much is going to happen because, again how do you
212 manage, and the leadership components of returning back to school, aren't really address at all.

213 We know that Chile was the first country to use markets for educational provision and we've
214 done this for 40 years and we all know that the result is tremendous segregation and inequity.
215 The previous government passed legislation to address some of the most negative effects of
216 marketization and also to strengthen public education by returning the responsibility of public
217 schools to the state rather than to the municipal government. But the current government doesn't
218 believe in those policies so they're implementing policies that they don't believe in. To what
219 extent and how that is going to be resolved, remains an issue. I think that if we do not resolve the
220 tremendous social segregation that we have in our school systems, the inequities that exist and
221 that are exacerbated by the school closure, we will not be able to give kids the opportunity that
222 they all deserve, and so much talent is going to go to waste.

223 We have so many talented children who really don't have an opportunity to develop and to
224 contribute to society as they are marginalized. Hopefully, the questions of inequity will be much
225 more at the forefront of policymakers' minds when they figure out how we are going to return
226 **28:56 Gutiérrez** *You know any what's so interesting is that despite the fact that you, from*
227 *within you see all these issues that need to be tackled, in the rest of Latin America will always*
228 *look up at Chile as this wonderful country, with all this innovation all this incredible capacity.*
229 *So I'm really certain that even though the challenges are tremendous, Chile has always come up*
230 *with wonderful, amazing solutions, because of the quality of its people. We have been seeing this*
231 *historically. Carmen I need to close this but I really wanted to send you my greetings my*
232 *solidarity from other places and hoping that Chile will come out of this strengthened in many*
233 *ways.*

234 **29:52 Montecinos** Well thank you for the opportunity to talk to you it's been fun and I can't
235 believe how time passed so fast. I think it's important, as you say, to see what we were thinking
236 at the time and then maybe in retrospect will say "oh why didn't we think of this." The main
237 thing is that we learn from this. But I'm not sure if we will necessarily learn the right things.

238 **30:20 Gutiérrez** Carmen, *muchísimas gracias*. Thank you so much.

239 **30:23 Montecinos** A tí. Que esté muy bien. Muchas gracias.

240 [Music]