

California State University, Monterey Bay



Oral History Interviews

Digital Proximities
Covid19 and the transformation of pedagogical practices

Creating this new curriculum. Why not?

Interview with
Anabel Díaz Santana

Recorded on April 29, 2020

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Digital Proximities 011 Díaz
Anabel Díaz Santana
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1 **00:00** [Music]

2 **00:10 Gutiérrez** *Muchisimas gracias. Thank you so much for giving me a time from your*
3 *day to talk a little bit about your experiences with this pandemic at your neck of the forest, and*
4 *just to share your experiences so that other educators can see how things are panning out in in*
5 *other places. As you know I have been talking to folks all over the planet. I was particularly*
6 *pleased to be able to get something from The Hague where you are, right? Why don't we start,*
7 *for those that are not familiar with your context and your trajectory: Where are you? What is*
8 *your training and your institutional context?*

9 **01:00 Díaz** Okay. So, I am Anabel Díaz. I am Spanish, and I am a Spanish lector, but
10 I have been living in the Netherlands for almost 28 years. I have been working, for the last 11
11 years at The Hague University of Applied Science. The Hague University is an applied sciences
12 university. I am a Spanish lector I'm also a Korean supervisor, and I am also a Country Tutor. It
13 means that I arrange the Erasmus Exchange with a few universities in Spain. Basically, I am
14 Spanish lector and I have been doing this since 1992, that is, for a long time.

15 **01:56 Gutiérrez** *What is your training? Was it as a linguist?*

16 **01:57 Díaz** Yes, I did Spanish philology

17 **02:01 Gutiérrez** *So, You have been living in the Netherlands for quite a while?*

18 **02:15 Díaz** Yes, since 1992, so, actually, I have been living for more time in the Netherlands
19 than in Spain.

20 **02:21 Gutiérrez** *I bet if you are anything like me or my wife Maria you still long for your*
21 *country of origin quite a bit, right?*

22 **02:35 Díaz** Yes, I'd said that. You know, I am Spanish, I have a Spanish nationality and I
23 never think about changing my nationality, but I am completely adapted to the Dutch society and
24 I feel I am part of it.

25 **02:57 Gutiérrez** *Speaking of that but what's the social context of the institution you teach*
26 *for I mean that northern European nations are more homogeneous than many other countries.*
27 *Do you work with middle-class, upper-class students? What kind of what social context?*

28 **03:13 Díaz** It is a public university and it's we all kind of middle class, lower class, high class.
29 We don't have in the Netherlands private universities, only one or two but it's not this is a public
30 university.

31 **03:45 Gutiérrez** *So you're teaching in the classroom normally and then Covid 19 happens?*

32 **03:56 Díaz** Yes. I teach a lot. I have now, in this semester, 18 hours of teaching and then that
33 it is a lot because I have to combine with a different task like, as you as I told you, a career
34 supervision, exchange, I am almost the coordinator of the department, we are working in the new
35 curriculum. So, it was already a very busy semester and when it happened, it was the first week. I
36 was oh my god, this is chaos! It happened four weeks ago, five weeks ago. Then you realize
37 actually what is the most important. The most important is teaching keeping contact with the
38 students that they feel that you are there and that they have to learn. And then we decided also to
39 postpone some of the other activities like the new curriculum we postponed it for we'll start with
40 a new curriculum in two years instead of next year and I also told my manager from I want, what
41 I want now is to to give a priority to all my teaching and my lessons.

42 **05:33 Gutiérrez** *So, you have dozens and dozens of students in different courses right*
43 *depending on you. So, one day you're teaching and then the university sends you an email says:*
44 *"we're not opening"*

45 **05:53 Díaz** Yes, from one day to the other one. At first when the university decided to
46 send us home, we thought that it would be only for a few weeks, for one or two weeks. Our
47 system the semester is divided into two terms and we were in week four of term three, so we
48 decided to try to finish term three, in any way we could. And then to give us, to have some time
49 to think what we are going to do in term four. Then the government decided to close until June,
50 so actually we have to complete the school year on line. And even we are now thinking about
51 how we are going to test everything, because some tests you can do with portfolios. We are
52 doing oral exams online but all the region tests, we are now deciding how to do it. And we have
53 also many international students that went back to their countries, right? And now they can't
54 come back. If we decided to hold classes or to do exams in June, we have the problem that many
55 students are not in the Netherlands anymore....

56 **07:41** I want to tell you that at first it was chaos but now we have to say teaching is the most
57 important thing. Now we are more used to it this is a long term situation that we that we have to
58 make decisions but we have also exam board they help us to make these decisions yeah you have
59 to change these that is the course is the way how the courses are design it and the way how you
60 test the course you want to change it it has to be approved by the exam board. So that kind of
61 things.

62 **08:36 Gutiérrez** *Wow! I can't even fathom how that happened. So give us an example. Do*
63 *you have one course? How many students you have in a regular class?*

64 **08:48 Díaz** I have about 25

65 **08:49 Gutiérrez** *Twenty-five. So, you are teaching in the classroom and you're expected to*
66 *teach everything online the next day? How do you do that?*

67 **08:59 Díaz** It's very strange how. We can because of the necessity. You know that you
68 have to work very hard and then you start doing PowerPoints, you are learning how to do the
69 audio in a PowerPoint and another colleague says "ah but we can use a Blackboard Collaborate."
70 We are very lucky that all the teachers at the University we have our laptop, we have a mobile
71 telephone. I bought the special thing and headphones and I got money from school to pay for it.
72 We have some platforms that we have and we're working with Microsoft Teams, with
73 Collaborate... I am not very technical but I'm learning a lot. On the other side there are some
74 colleagues who felt very overwhelmed and a little bit depressed and a few colleagues are now in
75 this situation.

76 **10:28 Gutiérrez** *When you have the students in the classroom, you're looking at them, you*
77 *can see their physical, body language. Now, on these little boxes, it's so difficult. How do you*
78 *track your student progress? What's your relationship with your students now?*

79 **10:43 Díaz** Yes. We have WhatsApp groups and then we try to keep it a little bit
80 informal with WhatsApp groups. And then, in the first week, for example, we had a very nice
81 exercise. It is to make a picture of my window here and then say what you can see from your
82 window practicing Spanish. All of them were making pictures and writing a few sentences in
83 Spanish of what can you see from your window. That was something not very academic, but you
84 know, just to keep contact. We work with a very nice publisher. They immediately made
85 webinars, and so it was incredible. We knew that we had to do all the lessons online and the
86 same week the publisher created these webinars. Teachers from the whole world, Spanish
87 lectures we connected with each other, and we followed this webinar, and we learned a lot. But

88 it's true that it's difficult sometimes. I have enough to say that I have lost some contact with a few
89 students and especially with the first-year students with a few first-year students

90 **12:29 Gutiérrez** *That's a little troubling but that's truly an exceptional situation.*

91 *Emotionally how do you feel the students that you are connected with. You just mentioned how*
92 *some of your colleagues that are feeling some of them, down. I'm not surprised. How do you feel*
93 *your students are faring with all this? Were they readier for this type of electronic digital*
94 *environment than we have to move ourselves into or are they also feeling disconnected?*

95 **13:03 Díaz** *It's funny because not I thought that our students knew that they were very*
96 *good with all these new techniques, but not all of them. I think that that they are happy that we*
97 *have online lessons and that they feel that they have continued with their studies I think that they*
98 *are very grateful yeah with all the things that you are sharing with them and with the lessons but*
99 *of course there are some students I have lost a few international students and I have to say that*
100 *they're back in their countries and they were first-year students so I think that they maybe decide*
101 *to stop with the study and start something new next year*

102 **14:15 Gutiérrez** *You know what's also a little sobering and intimidating is what you were*
103 *mentioned that this might become for the foreseeable future a new normal. It is not two weeks*
104 *here in California we don't know that we actually we can know it hasn't been officially stated but*
105 *we know that is very unlikely we will be able to go back to the classroom and the fall semester*
106 *yeah and that's intimidating because you know you if it is a couple of weeks it's even kind of*
107 *exciting right "let's see how we handle this" and as a permanent situation which is not*
108 *something that we're happy with and I'm assuming something similar is happening for you in the*
109 *Netherlands.*

110 **15:12 Díaz** The first weeks I have a course it's for oral skills and because we first
111 week when this happened we thought well we need time we need a week to sit together online
112 with the all the Spanish department to discuss how we are going to continue with our lessons at
113 what for material do we have to prepare how we're going to share the work and then I asked
114 students to prepare videos and to send them to send me the video for the oral skills class but after
115 two weeks they know we can connect with each other with teams and we can do the
116 presentations together and I saw that some of them they liked it very much how I do a video.
117 Sometimes they say no it's not anymore like that we have found this new way of working and we
118 have to adapt.

119 **16:23 Gutiérrez** *This is going to give us a busy summer for those both are in there in a*
120 *Northern countries because in Southern countries they're in the winter now. Some countries*
121 *actually went into sort of a winter break and for us it's going to be a long summer, that we need*
122 *to be ready for that interesting Fall that we have ahead of us. Time is flying and I'm looking at*
123 *my clock and I need to keep these clips short that they are digestible for folks. But before we*
124 *close I really wanted to have a little bit of a conversation with you as to not just the challenges*
125 *that you're facing that is clearly tremendous but also the opportunities that you see emerging*
126 *from this situation the learnings that you are gaining about this situation. Are there things that*
127 *you that you're discovering maybe we want to keep for the future? Advantages that you didn't see*
128 *before? What perspective can you give us?*

129 **17:40 Díaz** I think that's all the new materials that we are designing these online
130 materials is in the future we can use it we can and maybe we will keep on doing these extra
131 material and to place it and for students who can't attend the lessons - they can also have these
132 extra material and I would like maybe in the future - to learn more things from the technical part

133 you know... and that's it but I really miss my students to be with them in the classroom, you
134 know, this way to see them? We have to do it like this yeah but on the other side there are also,
135 there is also this distant way of teaching first students who don't have the possibility to go to
136 school. I think we are also creating this new curriculum. Why not. We can use these new ways of
137 learning online... have to find the positive.

138 **19:19 Gutiérrez** *They said we don't have an alternative, we better stay in the positive.*

139 *Anabel, I really thank you so much for your time this is wonderful to have had an opportunity to*

140 *have a conversation with you and I wish you the best hopefully you will be able to attain*

141 *objectives with your students for this and following period of time like. It is quite a challenge, but*

142 *as long as we stay safe... The numbers in the Netherlands are OK right?*

143 **20:01 Díaz** Yes, it is OK. We can go out we can go outside so if they say it is

144 *intelligent lockdown* yeah, that's the name that they have given to [it by] the Dutch authorities.

145 **20:30 Gutiérrez** *People in New York might feel a little offended by it. Like "we are dumb*

146 *or what?" of course I get it, it is a good way to organize themselves.*

147 [Laughs]

148 **20:47 Díaz** Thank you very much for inviting me yes

149 21:14 [Music]