Revista Lusófona de Educação
ISSN: 1645-7250
revista.lusofona@gmail.com
Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias
Portugal

Torres, Carlos Alberto
My last conversation with Paulo Freire
Revista Lusófona de Educação, núm. 35, 2017, pp. 193-195
Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias
Lisboa, Portugal

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=34951149012

How to cite
Complete issue
More information about this article
Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

Scientific Information System
Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal
Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

My last conversation with Paulo Freire

Carlos Alberto Torres

I was traveling, at the end of April 1997, to Madrid from Los Angeles where I have lived for almost two decades, to participate in a conference organized by the Universidad Complutense and the University of California.

On the way to the airport I had a sudden impulse to call Paulo Freire. I cannot recall why I felt such urgency, but we had been planning to write a book together about new educational challenges at the threshold of the XXI century. The book had a tentative title: *Education and the Possible Dream*.

We wanted to update the discussion about some of Paulo's great theses and think about ways to implement them in classrooms of the advanced capitalist world. We wanted, to use a phrase dear to Paulo, to "reinvent and not to repeat Paulo Freire."

I called him from my cellular phone on the way to the airport. Paulo answered the phone in his house in São Paulo and, after the customary greetings, I told him that I was flying to Europe and wanted to know when and where we could meet to work on the book. He told me that he would be giving a course at Harvard that Fall and perhaps it would be easier for me to travel to Cambridge than to São Paulo to work with him. Cambridge would provide us a more tranquil workplace than São Paulo, without the enormous demands that the academic, political and educational life of Brazil imposed on Paulo's agenda.

I asked him if he had been thinking about the overriding themes we would be addressing. His response was not only direct but seemed almost laconic: "Carlos, we have to criticize neoliberalism. It's the new demon of the world today." At that moment, there was a silence at the other end of the telephone which let me know that we had lost our connection. I was arriving at the Los Angeles International Airport, and the power of the communications systems in the area might have interfered with our call.

I hesitated to call him back. My boarding time was near and, of course, a cellular call is always costly. I decided to call him on my way back from Paris where I would work for a few days after the meeting in Madrid. I started to think

about an academic meeting in which I had recently participated at the Catholic University of São Paulo with retired São Paulo Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns who had been one of the foremost Brazilian representatives of the Theology of Liberation, along with Paulo Freire. The title of this meeting was "The Diabolic and the Symbolic," and it seemed to me a good one because, theologically speaking, the symbolic is the antithesis of the diabolic. The interrupted conversation with Freire stayed with me as I pondered the theme.

I never imagined that, while I was in Paris, I would learn of his sudden death, on May 2, 1997, of a heart attack soon after an operation on his coronary arteries. Paulo died alone while he was recovering from the operation in the intensive care unit.

One of the great masters of Latin America, with his prophetic gestures, white beard and eyes that reflected the dedicated authenticity of his utterance, captivating readers and listeners alike with his logic and his poetry, was dead. An enormous piece of the history of our cherished and conflictive continent died with him. Freire was one of the twentieth century's most important political philosophers of education.

I want to end these words by paying homage to Paulo Freire, critical conscience of Latin America, with a poem I wrote on the first anniversary of his death:

A little more than a year ago (For Paulo Freire)
A little more than a year ago, your magic was still strolling these streets.
Like a troubadour, you were singing songs of freedom.
The faces of children, youths, adults and old people were still practicing
All possible vowel combinations: be bi ba, bo, bu.
Curiosity was, once again, the basis of epistemology
And your generosity was challenging power.

A little more than a year ago, hope and wisdom still bore your name,
And utopia too,
Amid rancorous outcries, rows and popular knowledge
Wet with oppression but tempered
By amorous encounters of unknown intensities.

A little more than a year ago, your words were still shaping hymns,
Destroying palaces, crumbling temples,
Inviting us to an immoderate revolution,
And an impatiently patient struggle.
A little more than a year ago, Latin America was still full of contagious optimism,
Borders, barbed wire and bayonets were being erased
Like the indistinguishable characters of an extinct past while
Circuses, carnivals and processions were gathering, in their splendor,
The legacy of tradition and rupture.
Men and women were looking to politics
For truth, justice and liberty.

A little more than a year ago, we still had you here, among us.
Today, in your infinitely suffocating death, you still live within us.

A little more than a year ago you ascended in a sonorous vocal choir of words repeated
But reinvented as well,
Of traditional but not antiquated teaching,
Of prophecies where love is the fair measure of all things,
And where ethics and smiles are the banners and shields of an ancestral battle,
Like your lessons, teacher, friend who continues among us.

Notas

[1] Professor and Director, Paulo Freire Institute, UCLA. Founding Director, with Paulo Freire, Moacir Gadotti, José Eustaquio Romão, Walter García, and Francisco Gutierrez, of the Paulo Freire Institute, São Paulo (1991). Director of the Paulo Freire Institute-Argentina. This article was written in Spanish in the Paulo Freire Institute, São Paulo, Brazil, December 15, 2005, and translated by Dr. Peter Lownds, Visiting Scholar, Paulo Freire Institute-UCLA.

[2] Written in the Paulo Freire Institute, São Paulo, May 2nd, 1998.