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# A praxis of hope: lessons from the ‘untested feasibility’ for twenty-first century education

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## ABSTRACT

This article offers a contemporary interpretation of the work of global educator, Paulo Freire, inspired by the concept of ‘untested feasibility’ which he first expounded in his work *Pedagogy of Hope*. Our purpose is to pay particular attention to some relevant lessons stemming from the imagination of what has so far been untested and yet is feasible, which Freire closely associates with his views on utopia. These lessons remain fully valid for education in the twenty-first century in a globalised world characterised by tensions and uncertainties. In this sense, these pages pay homage to Paulo Freire as global educator and respond to his willingness to revive and discuss his intellectual and human legacy in order to keep it alive. We share some reflections, inspired by Paulo Freire as a global educator, and his dialogues with other thinkers, so that, together, we may find encouragement for the kind of educational commitment that may contribute to improve the fate of the world. In short, this is an invitation to the praxis of untested feasibility that may provide us with the resources that are needed to set out for a journey of hope.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## If a global pandemic is the answer, what is the question?

We may deliberately misquote the poet T. S. Eliot by affirming that March 2020 was ‘the cruelest month’, for at that time ‘the cruel pedagogy of the virus’ (De Sousa-Santos 2020) was on display. March brought with it an unexpected scenario, global in its scope and local in its everyday impact, and posed a threat that announced a dystopian landscape, a mirror in which we could see reflected and intensified the best and the worst of humanity. This scenario is not yet over, and remains a warning that reminds us both of our fragility and of the need to continue searching for what unites us as a human species, rather than what separates us.

The pandemic has forced us to consider a set of important, strategic, and even existential questions. What would Paulo Freire (1921–1997) say in a situation like this? Logically, this is a counterfactual question, but we may accept it as an analytical resource; that is, a way of thinking about our post-pandemic world through a conversation with Paulo Freire. Our purpose is to pay particular attention to relevant lessons stemming from the imagination of what has so far been untested and yet is feasible; one Freire closely associates with his views on utopia. These lessons remain valid for education in the twenty-first century in a globalised world characterised by growing tensions and uncertainties. The 100th Anniversary of Paulo Freire’s birth provides us with an opportunity to look behind and ahead, and from multiple perspectives opened up by his pedagogical

experience, which continue to yield results in different areas of human concern. What follows is an invitation to rethink our global world drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, to ponder key issues.

Paulo Freire is arguably a key twentieth century educator whose thinking and proposals have had a global reach. His works have been translated into many languages and are constantly being republished. With generous intellectual honesty, Paulo Freire subjected his own work to continuous self-criticism and revision. Indeed in his last years, he called for new readings of and approaches to his thought, rather than a passive reception of his books in order to update and improve it in the light of contemporary interpretations. Paulo Freire was not only an ‘activist’; his theoretical reflections on education coincide with important schools of thought such as pragmatism, constructivism and critical theory. What is more, his work anticipated the development of current intellectual perspectives, such as Habermas’s communication theory, Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition, or Hartmut Rosa’s theory of resonance. It can also be seen, in retrospect, as having paved the ground for some of the guiding ideas behind agendas like education for all, education for citizenship, and education as a common good besides having undoubtedly inspired multiple education and lifelong learning policies worldwide.

Freire coined the phrase *inédito viável*, that is, ‘untested yet feasible’ (or ‘untested feasibility’)<sup>1</sup> in one of his latest books, *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire 2021). By untested yet feasible horizons he meant positive utopias; that is scenarios of possibility that, even if they have not been tried before, are nonetheless practicable ideals. In this sense, Paulo Freire was from the beginning a thinker *avant la lettre*, a pioneer and a ‘pilgrim of the obvious’ (Passeti 2018, 127–142) in his claim, support and anticipation of dimensions that twenty-first century ‘knowledge societies’ can no longer afford to ignore: education for all throughout life, education for global citizenship, and education for sustainable development. Carlos Alberto Torres ends his book *First Freire* by describing him as a ‘utopian traveller’, and he states that

... as poets have suggested in countless verses, utopia is that distant horizon, a horizon that one always wants to reach but can never approach. One takes two steps towards this horizon and it recedes another two paces. What, then, is the advantage of utopia, we might ask? As a rational and spiritual model guiding our desire, it helps us to keep moving. (Torres 2014, 131–132)

## An open letter to humanity

Freire’s work seeks to fulfil the utopian desire to understand and express reality through the word, as that vehicle of knowledge that allows us to participate in the reconstruction of our world. Undoubtedly, both his interest in language and his commitment to those most disadvantaged – ‘the oppressed’, in his own words – lies in the importance of ‘pronouncing the world’. There are few things as gratifying as giving access to writing and reading to those who had always been denied such a longed-for treasure. Nobody is predestined to be illiterate but many are prevented from becoming literate. Literacy, to which Freire devoted a considerable part of his ‘pilgrimage’, is as much about reading the word as it is about reading reality (Freire and Macedo 2005).

As the Mozambican writer Mia Couto (2006) notes, spelling mistakes are not simply grammar bound; they are, rather, life errors. People who have access to the first letters after prolonged periods of forced silence, experience this as a real revolution, a profound transformation, for they do not only discover a new world, but above all they partake in its foundation as they pronounce it. Freire’s passion for philological issues in his own training pervades his overall works, and can also be seen and appreciated in his constant striving for precision in the use language, his careful search for the most appropriate grammatical constructions, and the purposefully didactic orientation of his prose in order to make his rationale comprehensible thereby establishing the best possible communication with his readers and audiences. We were privileged to witness this in a keynote address at the University of Valencia in 1995 which he gave during his last stay in Spain (Beltrán-Llavador 2021b). That occasion evinced Freire’s remarkable consistency with regard to his life and his work, which coalesced and unified the many faces of his profile: as educator and thinker, as

pedagogue and philosopher. All of this is reflected in the need to ‘pronounce the world’, which sums up Freire’s programme of action, grounded in the reality of those who have been described as ‘the wretched of the earth’, and based on a profound ‘pedagogical creed’, to use John Dewey’s own pronouncement, whose words echo and reverberate in Freire’s writings (Rogers 2019).

It is, in effect, this creed what allows us to read Paulo Freire’s entire production as the best expression of his constant will to connect words and the world; a ceaseless and indefatigable educational endeavour to redress our relationship to the world (Rosa 2019). The general hypothesis of our reflection is the consideration of Paulo Freire’s vast *oeuvre* as a sort of open letter to humanity, a message that threads together words and the world, one that weaves texts and contexts, an epistle rooted in the past whilst pointing to the future. However, what we metaphorically call ‘a letter’<sup>2</sup> did not develop as the monologue of a solitary thinker but, rather, as a choral and plural conversation with his fellow human beings. Such a letter is the clearest example of the kind of dialogical practice that Freire always defended, since in his experience, ‘... dialogue characterises an epistemological relationship’ (Freire and Macedo 1995, 379). In this sense, each reader instantly becomes simultaneously a co-author because we all read with our own eyes. This dialogue engages the whole of humanity and one that fortunately became a legacy of planetary scope around the year 2017 when Paulo Freire’s archive was ascribed to UNESCO’s *Memory of the World Programme*. Freire’s 100th anniversary of his death in 2021 made it possible to bring his work up to date and to pay tribute to him through numerous initiatives which ranged from those promoted by social movements or trade unions to many others carried out in schools and universities.<sup>3</sup>

### How did we get here?

Let me return to the global pandemic. This virus is the result of human decisions: the consequence of ways of thinking and modes of living; the result of human choices; and the direct effect of abject conditions and inhuman behaviour inflicted upon each other. The virus is the clearest reflection of what Amin Maalouf has described as a dramatic dissonance with the world (Maalouf 2011). The pandemic acts as a mirror that shows in its full nakedness the best and the worst of human beings, and it dramatically reveals social inequalities. This pandemic puts the paradigm of modernity in crisis.

And it also reminds us of the myth of Pandora. We may remember that as Prometheus stole the fire of the gods, in revenge Zeus gave Pandora a jar or box; a container she was told not to open under any circumstances. Pandora was so curious that she opened it thus releasing all the evil forces within it. And even if many would probably like to know how the story ends, we will also need to resist the temptation and wait until the end.

Our present predicament illustrates Hegel’s master-and-slave dialectic. We have fallen prey to our very notion of production, which pervades our social imaginary. What a paradox! The more arrogant our conviction that we had become masters of the world, the more trapped we are in our self-made prison to the extent that we are now not just metaphorically but literally confined.

### Some lessons from the unprecedented situation we are in

In our contemporary world, that of the twenty-first century, Paulo Freire would have asked himself many questions. He had already expressed many times his concern about the following issue, in particular. Observing so many problematic situations in the world in which he lived, he asked himself: What would our world be without a kind of education that makes us aware of the importance of participating in our world? As Paulo Freire (2000, 88) said: ‘To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it’. And to this question, which is still as pressing as it was during his own lifetime, or even more so, I would dare to add these others: How did we get here? How is the current education system implicated in the current state of affairs? And, above all, what lessons can be drawn from our present quandaries? In what follows I will single out four lessons. They may be seen as a sort of axes

of our world map. Within our complex societies we can identify dynamic systems in which relationships are established between local and global coordinates. In this sense, the current education system can be a relevant actor in promoting social change and improvement by incorporating into the curriculum key concepts for a common agenda of educational policies and practices, concerning issues of (global) citizenship, sustainability, (common) goods, and (lifelong) learning. All these issues can make a decisive contribution to the configuration of a new, necessary, an even urgent, social contract, which now more than ever, must be at the same time a contract with nature (Serres 1991).

We speak, then, of lessons that are at the same time frameworks of understanding and thresholds for engagement. In short, the four lessons commit us to move from thinking to acting, from words to deeds, and from vision to response. These frameworks, let us insist on it, establish a clear ‘dialectic of the global and the local’, as Torres recently proposed in his contribution to a timely volume on *Comparative Education* (Torres, Arnove and Misiaszek 2022). These lessons – be they seen as axes, attractors, or commitments–, are as follows:

### **First, education for global citizenship (EGC)**

UNESCO’s response to the challenge of peace and sustainable development threatened by human rights violations, inequities and poverty is flagged in the programme Education for Global Citizenship; this initiative invites us to *rewrite our society by means of a new educational narrative*. Even before providing education to our children through schooling opportunities, we need to educate them, from the earliest stage, towards a citizenship that may renew our world. We have been educated within eighteenth-century models of schooling but we now live in the twenty-first century. We are closing a historical parenthesis in the evolution of schools. Our world has changed: we no longer inhabit the Gutenberg Galaxy but a technologically sophisticated space; that is, we live in networked, digital societies. John Dewey already said a hundred years ago that we have to change our crossed arms for crossed connections. Our schools need to be seen, and function, as laboratories and workshops where we can (i) try other epistemological pathways, (ii) explore novel ways of building education, (iii) work perhaps in hyper classrooms, and (iv) try formulas of co-teaching (Beltrán-Llavador, Martínez, and Gabaldón-Esteván 2021). Our schools have to be laboratories because our society is already a place of experimentation, and we need to try out new forms of participation and innovation to pave the ground for a renewed, creative and radical democracy. Thus, we have to learn to name the new realities afresh. Freire did this through what may look like an oxymoron for it is no other than the open-ended space of the ‘untested yet feasible’, which gave the word ‘utopia’ an affirmative rather than a negative meaning. In fact, utopia means, in a literal and etymological sense, a non-place (or *u-topos*), a reality yet to be built and created; a space of possibility where we may conceive of a world that is a little more dignified, more habitable, more humane. We only need to make it visible, to tread its uncharted territory, to work and word it out and ‘walk the talk’. That world is unprecedented in that it has not been attempted yet, but it is nonetheless feasible, viable, possible. And it is one that needs to start to be built.

### **Second, the sustainable development goals (SDG)**

The United Nations approved in 2015, for the next 15 years, an agenda of 17 Goals that recognise that the greatest challenge today is the eradication of poverty and that without achieving it there can be no sustainable development. Goal 4 is specifically dedicated to the quality of education.

Unfortunately, the latest news on the achievement of Goal 4 is not encouraging, as shown in the recent report *Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a crossroads: regional monitoring report SDG4 – Education 2030*, launched on World Literacy Day, 8 September 2022 (UNESCO 2022). As the initial summary states: ‘The evidence presented in this publication reinforces the urgent need to accelerate progress for the educational goals set in 2015 with more investment, social

participation, dialogue and state capacities to enable improvement and the systemic transformation of education’ (3). Freire was able to denounce educational inequalities as a reflection of social inequity in his foundational work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. And as it has been recently argued, throughout his work, Freire also left more than enough signs of his sensitivity to environmental issues that were beginning to emerge so as to hypothetically imagine a missing chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* dedicated to Ecopedagogy (Misiąszek and Torres 2019) and, hence, feel challenged to fill the gap.

### **Three global commons: planet, peace, people**

In 2015, UNESCO published the report *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* (UNESCO 2015) It was followed in 2021 by a new report entitled *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (UNESCO 2021), which it takes as its starting point three global common goods (Planet, Peace, People). The objective of this report is to materialise the idea that education is a global common good, after an international consultation to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and of the planet.

To do this, we need to equip ourselves with social maps, and on a wide scale, in ways that shed light and provide guidance in a world of increasing complexity, ‘full of sound and fury’. More and more often we are distracted from what is worth paying attention to; namely, social reconstruction, collective projects, and a common culture. To focus on what really matters, sound theoretical foundations are necessary. The deliberately provocative suggestion that there is nothing more practical than a good theory had been supported, albeit with a different phrasing, by Hanna Arendt who, in the prologue to *The Human Condition*, proposed something as simple as to ‘stop and think about what we do’ (Arendt 1993, 3). We do need to stop and think. We need new ways of looking at current realities. And we also need to reform our understandings. Spinoza raised this need more than 300 years ago in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (Spinoza 1992). We need, in short, other ways of understanding (thinking, seeing and relating to) the world.

### **Lifelong learning**

One lesson that cannot be renounced is that of the value of education throughout life. Three months into his hundredth year the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer gave an address, ‘Erziehung ist Sich-Erziehen’ (‘Education is Self-Education’) at the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Gymnasium, Eppelheim, on 19 May 1999 (Gadamer 2000). There, he held that we learn as we teach, and in the very process of learning, we educate others. For his own part, Edgar Morin, the French thinker, wrote the book *Changeons de voie (Let’s change lanes, the lessons of the Coronavirus)* (Morin 2020) as he turned one hundred years old. Authors like Freire, Gadamer, and Morin are the living proof that we are, by definition, radically and definitively, beings for learning. So, just as in 1972 Edgar Faure’s report (Faure 1972) focused on *learning to be*, we might now expand it to include, as a complement and a counterpoint, further considerations on *being to learn*. What makes us human is not only our ability to learn from birth to death but also our openness to it.

Let us, then, try to continue learning under the guidance and inspiration of Paulo Freire, and to specifically apply his wisdom to the sociological perspective on education.

### **What lessons for the sociology of education can be drawn from this pandemic?**

The pandemic could well educate our way of seeing and reading the world by increasing the variety of perspectives on core issues of the global education agenda. It is preventing us from taking anything for granted (which should just be common sense), by unveiling, challenging or problematising what has often seemed obvious or natural. The extent of this unprecedented crisis is enormous, whilst its complexity highlights the fact that everything is ‘co-implicated’, interwoven, interrelated,

and interdependent. We had learned to understand the world in terms of clear-cut dichotomies, splitting our experience into rigidly dualistic Cartesian categories: mind–body, politics-economics, theory-practice, and thought-action. In truth, a divided mind is an alienated mind, isolated and set apart from reality. Freire assumes that human beings participate in the construction of historical reality. And history is open, not fatalistically determined; it is time filled with possibility, not inexorably decided. This understanding presupposes ‘the serious assessment of historical alternatives’ (Wallerstein 1998, 1–2).

We have to confront programmed fatalism, that is, the message continuously drilled into us that there is nothing we can do to change things. On the contrary, in the social realm, rather, nothing is inevitable; in truth, everything is yet to be done. The final chapter of *Resources of Hope*, entitled ‘The Practice of Possibility’, includes a timely reflection by Raymond Williams:

If I say, estimating, for example, whether we’ll avoid a nuclear war, ‘I see it as 50–50’, I instantly make it 51–49, or 60–40, the wrong way. That is why I say we must speak for hope, as long as it doesn’t mean suppressing the nature of the danger. I don’t think my socialism is simply the prolongation of an earlier experience. When I see that childhood coming at the end of millennia of much more brutal and thoroughgoing exploitation, I can see it as a fortunate time: an ingrained and indestructible yet also changing embodiment of the possibilities of common life. (Williams 1989, 322)

If we were to sum up in simple words the main lesson of this pandemic it is that we must change the way we look at the world. If we do not change the way we look at it, how are we going to change it? How are we going to face the future and build the world? The pandemic highlights in a very visible way something that Torres recently pointed out in his preface to Teodoro’s, *Contesting the Global Development of Sustainable and Inclusive Education* (2020); namely, a series of narrative and theoretical tensions around and between the expansion of democracy and the rise of authoritarian populisms. These tensions beg us to ask radical questions: can we identify what separates us, as well as identify that which unites us as human beings? Never before have we been so locked up/ down/in and out, and never before have we been so open, so utterly exposed, to what will be earth’s destiny if we don’t act. Therefore, we are both bound and free to rethink ourselves, to stop and think about what unites us as a species. Only this will make it possible for people not just to survive, but also to thrive in relation to each other as the suicidal tendency of individual egos in isolation and alienated from one another is this way precluded. That is why this pandemic offers us the unique opportunity to learn and to transform ourselves. Teodoro concludes his work highlighting the very heart of Freire’s work, which

... brings to the fore the statement of a principle that is absolutely contemporary: Acknowledging the universality of the human condition and the equal dignity of human beings implies that one must see education as an action project centered on social (and cognitive) justice, the utopistics (or viable unknown) of contemporary education policies and processes. (2020, 106)

These lessons, which undoubtedly presupposes a certain theoretical understanding of social reality at the same time entails a programme of action; a horizon that commits us as educators and citizens to its achievement. They reflect very clearly and directly Ernst Bloch’s principle of hope (Bloch 1986) which is synthesised in his well-known apothegm ‘not yet’.<sup>4</sup> They are, then, lessons glimpsed though still not yet fully learned. What can we do to achieve them? In what follows, we list three principles for action.

## What can we do?

### *Repoliticising the role of universities*

As agents of change, universities and higher education occupy a privileged position to challenge the failed economic development model of neoliberalism. Universities can reorient their mission towards the reconstruction of fairer, more equitable and less unequal societies. Such is the

conception of a citizens' university for the twenty-first century, a political university, for the *polis*, that is, at the service of a citizenship that is at the same time local and global. For the construction of fairer societies, we need to consider higher education as a public good beyond the rationale of structural greed imposed by neoliberalism, overcome the competition versus cooperation dichotomy, and foster dialogue between epistemologies.

We can make a contemporary interpretation of Freire's (2000) pedagogy of the oppressed as a pedagogy of recognition, by a cross-fertilisation of the former with Honneth's (1996) theory of 'the struggle for recognition' whose tenet is that any subject deserves to be recognised in his or her capacities that make them individually unique yet socially equal to other human beings. Only in this way can the current societies of contempt give way to societies of appreciation where the spheres of friendship and solidarity prevail. In a similar vein, Hartmut Rosa defends a sociology that stresses the kind of relationship to the world that may help us to restore our connection with it, based on his theory of resonance (Rosa 2019). In order to rediscover this connection, so that it can be re-established we can put into practice a 'pedagogy of resonance' which gives value to a responsible and solidarity-based social and economic development, and invites us to explore new approaches to sustainable development.

### ***Rethinking sustainable development***

Some critics have also questioned the ideology behind the very notion of sustainable development, arguing that this paradigm could legitimise, rather than question, the sustainability of development since unlimited growth may end up turning production into destruction. The question of sustainability makes it unavoidable to address the connections between economy and ecology. An economy at the service of humanity must be a sustainable, an ecological economy with a human face, one that embraces life, if we really want to stay alive, as scientist and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva (1988) claims. Yet, we can only embrace life through relationships that are filled with respect for each other and for the planet we inhabit. Education for Global Citizenship seeks sustainability on a human scale. From an ecological lens, it can be regarded as an inexhaustible form of energy: the cleanest, most renewable, most responsible, and healthiest. We are all enriched by this energy as we feed and constantly renew it through our shared learning for it is transformative of world and self.

### ***Rewrite our society with a new narrative***

To construct a new narrative we need to build new vocabularies. Language accompanies the world, it serves to enact and to shape reality, but it also serves to deceive. Marx said that in the social struggle, it is important to give things their real name, otherwise words may be used – like money – and handled as if they were commodities. We need noble meanings with which to re-signify names, with which we can 'language'<sup>5</sup> the world. When we say, 'I give you my word', we are verbally signing a commitment, as it were, a sort of spoken contract based on a relationship of trust. We have to give our word to ourselves and to our world.

### ***How can we renew a common world?***

The dystopian situation we are in today imposes on us a categorical imperative (in Kantian's terms): to renew a common world. This is our collective task at hand. In other words, we need to morph the current dystopia into a utopia by bringing unprecedented, yet possible, changes for the common good. How? Through education. What kind of education? Education for Global Citizenship.

Education for Global Citizenship translates Hannah Arendt's (1961) sense of birth right into the practice of Freire's 'untested yet feasible' pedagogies. Education for Global Citizenship considers that the present generations, the ones educated by us, and the future generations of those who



will continue to learn and will educate us, may in fact embody ‘untested yet feasible’ possibilities towards a common world that must be renewed.

Against the backdrop of this catastrophe, a sociological perspective would offer valuable guidance towards a feasible utopia: one where we would become more aware of social and educational inequalities, and strengthen our commitment so as to reverse or at least attenuate them; to continue to stop and think, even in the midst of protest and to regard reflection, as in itself an active form of protest; to remind us that what makes human beings equal is our shared fragile human condition; and teach us not to lose sight of each other, to also keep others in mind in order to continue the never-ending and ever-renewed task of educating the other and our own self so as to take better care of each other and of our own world (Beltrán-Llavador and Venegas 2020). True, globalisation has made us pandemic citizens, and we wonder if this crisis may, perhaps, bring with it the end of global citizenship. But then, we should also remember these lines from Hölderlin’s poem, *Patmos*: ‘where there is danger, /A rescuing element grows as well’ (Hölderlin 1970).<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, we may choose to use this pandemic, as a generating occasion, as Freire’s would put it, as a chance to learn together lessons towards a shared, more just and more equitable world. In fact, this pandemic crisis is accelerating a huge educational shift, a profound transformation of the world of education at large.

### What are the possible futures of global citizenship education?

What makes us human is our capacity to learn throughout our entire lives, and that we are open to learning, from the cradle to the grave. As Freire reminded us, ‘we are indisputably programmed beings. But we are in no way predetermined. And we are programmed above all to learn’ (Freire 2005, 169).

The future has not been written: we are writing it right now; we are unfolding its narrative. Umberto Eco called us ‘readers *in fabula*’. And, before him, Heraclitus had claimed: ‘If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it’. Learning to expect the unexpected is learning to rewrite society. In order to do so, and as we aspire to full citizenship, we have to enter the realm of the universal while we remain rooted in, and are not alienated from, the sphere of the particular. Citizenship has, in fact, been defined as ‘the criterion of as well as the precondition for democracy’ (Barry Clarke and Foweraker 2001, 67).

This epidemic is a huge question mark, and it is also a paradox, for while it is, itself, a product of globalisation, at the same time it puts in crisis the most perverse effects of globalisation. We are living through something unprecedented; still not tested. It is from this space of possibilities, which have not been tried yet that something feasible can emerge. As Paulo Freire said in *Pedagogy of Hope*, hope is a disposition to imagine future situations as possible; a disposition to move from the thinkable to the doable. Spinoza already reminded us in his *Political Treatise* that ‘a free multitude is guided more by hope than by fear, while a subjugated multitude is guided more by fear than by hope’ (Spinoza 2002, 700). Education for Global Citizenship sets itself to transition away from fear, to bring to fruition a politics of hope by gathering ‘a practice of possibility’ (Williams 1989, 315–322).

The story of Pandora’s box was mentioned at the beginning and I promised to tell you the end of it as I come to a close. Do you remember how the myth unfolded? When Pandora succeeds in closing the box, once the evils that the gods held at bay had been released, only Elpis, the spirit of hope, remained there. Thence the expression: hope is the last thing lost.

As public intellectuals, teachers and researchers have a duty to learn the lessons of the pandemic, or more precisely the pandemic’s *Paideia*, by bringing together the questions it raises and the answers it forces us to seek. These questions may act as seeds of hope, a way of prompting the uncharted territory of a common and better world to be mapped as it is explored.

In conversation with Carlos Alberto Torres, Freire himself gave an answer about the legacy he left us.

What is my legacy? I think that it is just one (...) ‘Paulo Freire was a man who loved, who could not understand a life existence without love and without knowing. Paulo Freire lived, loved and tried to know. Paulo Freire was constantly curious and asking questions to himself. Do you see that it is not a personal legacy? This is the legacy which all people in the world, with a minimal of good sense, leave to the other, to the next generations. And this is what I hope can be said about me, even what I thought about education lost meaning. But that I loved, it can never lose meaning. (Freire, quoted in Torres 1995, 181)

These pages are part of that utopian journey, in the company of Paulo Freire (Beltrán-Llavador 2021a) in search of what is untested yet feasible, a journey of education and lifelong learning. Our human condition is both one of learning to be (becoming) and of being (becoming) to learn, for ‘o caminho se faz caminhando’ (Freire and Horton 2002). The full awareness that we participate in this journey – that we *are* the very journey-gives us the rare privilege of becoming pilgrims. If we can also count on the wisdom and inspiration of teachers like Paulo Freire, then our pilgrimage can be enriched in an extraordinary way, and become a priceless human experience, a masterful life lesson.

## Notes

1. It is not easy to translate the Portuguese expression ‘inédito viável’. Freire himself realised the difficulty of rendering its precise meaning in English. Manuela Guiherme points out that the translator of *Pedgogy of Hope* proposed the term ‘untested viable’, with which Freire agreed. However, Guilherme suggests the translation ‘viable unknown’ (Guilherme 2017, 433) while Carlos Alberto Torres adopts the term ‘untested feasible’, whose meaning in Spanish he also associates with ‘feasible not yet proved’ (‘factible no probado’) (Torres forthcoming).
2. The term ‘letter’ is not only metaphorical, but also real, as shown in Paulo Freire’s published *Letters to Cristina. Reflections on My Life and Work* (Freire 1996) and in his volume *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach* (Freire 2005). He also corresponded extensively with many of his friends, with university colleagues and with teachers, and this correspondence has been partially included in the third part of his posthumous work, *Pedagogy of Possible Dreams* (Freire 2015, 173–178).
3. Some examples, among others, are the recent bronze sculpture in the Faculty of Education Library at Cambridge University (<https://news.educ.cam.ac.uk/paulo-freire-sculpture-installed>), or the visual display dedicated to the Brazilian thinker at the Universitat de València Teacher Training Faculty (<https://www.uv.es/uvweb/magisteri/es/noticias/cien-anos-paulo-freire-1285923389647/Novetat.html?id=1286223894892>).
4. Utopian imagination, for Bloch, ‘has a correlate real possibility’. Hence, ‘much in the world is still unclosed’ (Bloch 1986, 196).
5. Even if the author first thought about its Spanish equivalent as a ‘neologism’ (*apalabrar*), it bears some resemblance with the notions, in English, of ‘linguaging as world-making’ and ‘worlding the language’. (Demuro and Gurney 2021).
6. Translated from: Hölderlin (1970).

## Disclosure statement

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