

Jesús Gómez in Brazil: Days in Spring

by

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I met Jesús Gómez—Pato—in the work experience part of my post-doctorate course, which I carried out between 2001 and 2002 in CREA (Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities), in the University of Barcelona. I joined CREA in order to study the “Learning Communities” project which was being developed then, and, at that time Pato was one of the people responsible for presenting the project to professional people, and to the families of primary school pupils all over Spain. Due to this, he became a point of reference for me. Throughout the long journeys we undertook as part of the team, on the way to various schools, I had long conversations with him about the project, the social changes at that time, love, and friendship. Pato was also working intensively on his research on love in the risk society, and we loved to talk to him about the potential for a love which is dialogic and communicative.

His way of talking to the teaching staff and family members in the schools which I saw him speaking in, the books he recommended, the questions he asked me, encouraged me to dream of establishing a job and relationships in Brazil and moving towards a more socially efficient direction and increased “dialogic amorousness” in the Freirean way. Pato frequently talked to me about his friendship with Paulo Freire and about the wondrous things he had written, making me aware of his work and desirous to read it—I felt shamed that as a Brazilian I had only read “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed” because in the university where I studied Freire’s work was not highly valued.

It was on one of those trips with the “Learning Communities” team when in Bakio, in the Basque country which was his homeland, Pato gave me a lion-shaped key ring (which is the emblem for his country). The idea was that when I went back to Brazil I could create a “Brazilian CREA” and put the keys for the

International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 1 (1) (Spring 2008)

office on that key ring. At that moment, when Pato talked about it with such great intensity, I started to believe that in fact it would be possible to create a workgroup with the same theoretical foundation as CREA in São Carlos, with the same solidarity that they establish between their members, and which would have the same mission for social transformation which I observed in that group.

As soon as I returned to Brazil in July 2002, I started to disseminate what I had learnt from inside my university to other places outside it, through open discussion sessions. I also started to search for people who could identify with these ideas and who had a desire to do this type of work in Brazil. The group was formed quickly, and in October 2002, the Nucleus for Research and Social and Educational Action (NIASE) was founded. To this day, the office still uses the lion key ring which Pato gave me. The first activity we promoted was a Dialogic Literary Gathering. Soon we started with the dissemination of the “Learning Communities” project in the city of São Carlos, and a local school decided to take part in it. At the same time we were looking for people who would like to get involved in education for young people and adults within the framework of these initiatives. As early as November 2003, we had tackled various work fronts and in NIASE we thought that it would be very significant to have Jesús Gómez with us for a few days, so that he could see what we were doing and it would be also useful for us in order to continue our work. We invited him and he accepted.

Pato arrived in Brazil on the 8th of November 2003, so that he could participate in a series of events which were happening over the following weeks. I remember that he was happy and that he suddenly began to speak in Portuguese (at the beginning of the same year he had been in Porto Alegre, where he had learnt enough Portuguese to be able to communicate in the language of his hosts). Already during the trip from São Paulo to São Carlos, over the 250 kilometres that the journey covered, The colours and the smells of spring, which were at their height over that period, enchanted Pato. Later, he added the flavours of the different fruits he tasted on his visit, not only mangoes, papaya, oranges and bananas which he had already tasted but which he said had a stronger taste in Brazil, but also jabuticabas (which are black and white and sweet), and pitangas (which he called mini pumpkins) which he tasted for the first time, to the list of things that enchanted him.

His first participation in a talk was at the inauguration of the First São Carlos Conference on Education, which was an opportunity for him to talk about democratic education as a requirement for the construction of citizenship. In the preceding two days before the conference, Pato started to work on the slides which would guide his speech along with Adriana Bogado, an Argentinean friend who had completed her work experience in CREA and who was then working in NIASE. She came along to translate all the slides into Portuguese and to give them their final aesthetic finish. They were always laughing (it was impossible not to laugh around Pato, since humour was his trademark).

Over the two whole days that the Conference lasted, along with Pato I participated in the round table discussions and attended the talks. His presentation caused such a huge impact in the auditorium that he was given a standing ovation. This surprised us, the people from NIASE, that a speech to the public in recently learnt Portuguese would have such an impact. Later, when we talked about our astonishment, he said to us "...it is because I am also a little bit Brazilian." After the Conference, he was invited by the Secretary of Education for the city, to visit schools and to participate in meetings to discuss the situation related to education in São Carlos. Always accompanied by someone from NIASE, which was something that became indispensable, he listened to the stories with great attention and asked us about anything he didn't understand, or about anything he didn't feel he had enough information about, so that he could then use this information as evidence later. In the days that followed Pato worked tirelessly. He visited schools and worked with educators for literacy groups for adults and young people, he participated in the subjects taught by teachers from NIASE in degree courses in the Universidad Federal de São Carlos, he participated in the commemorative Festival for a Year of Dialogic Literary Gatherings in Brazil, and he visited the school which had been transformed into a "Learning Community" and talked to the teachers and family members there. Everywhere he went he left his mark with his intensity, enthusiasm and belief in life. He also demonstrated his scientific rigour and his political position in relation to the world. He made friends, and had admirers everywhere he went. Then the First Regional Congress on Education for Adults and Young People (1st CREPA), which was being organised by NIASE, began. Pato was a central person in this event. The auditorium was full of educators, involved in education for adults and young people, researchers on that subject and students from the university, as well as some adult educators. Pato opened the conference, which was another opportunity to speak Portuguese. His words came to us full of strength, hope, dreams, the acknowledgement of the battle which men and women who he had been able to talk to over those few days, were fighting in order to create a Brazil which was more egalitarian and just.

His attentive presence in the other activities within the Conference encouraged educators to participate in the activities too: people who were making a speech for the first time in a University, and people who were with him and anyone who needed to, could hear his unmistakable "aupa". Even faced with so much work, Pato found the time to talk to the teacher training students and Ph.D students who wanted to speak to him about their research projects, as well as time to be with the NIASE team with whom he discussed the work he had seen. It was based on these discussions that we organised the 2nd CREPA Conference, which took place in 2005.

At the end of his stay, he still found time to talk to young people about the need to construct dialogic relationships, and communicative love. The eyes of the people who were listening to him sparkled when faced with something which seemed to be a marvellous revelation: that it is possible to have personal relation-

ships based on solidarity and dialogue, which involve commitment and which respect the equality of difference.

On the 28th of November 2003 Pato returned to Spain leaving all of us full of energy to work and with which to live life. We had learned from him to above all not to waste lives, either our own or the lives of other people. The time we had shared with Jesús Gómez in São Carlos had been very intense, that was the main trait of this person, our friend: intensity in everything he did and in every relationship he established.

The time Jesús Gomez spent in São Carlos made our work more meaningful and more rigorous; he also made our lives more beautiful. The passage of Jesús Gómez through the world made the world more beautiful, but he also left us with a sense of nostalgia and responsibility: it is our duty to work towards a better world and in a way in which our own path can also be a beautiful way to live in the world. AÚPA, Pato. We will continue.