

A Walking Education: Taking it Further

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Holland's paper effectively theorizes the educative nature of moving — specifically, walking — through nature. She calls attention to the communicative aspects of walking and the ways that our minds can become attuned to the world around us. This attunement, and physical exertion while being attuned, can lead to transformative growth. I very much agree with Holland's main arguments. Instead of taking an adversarial stance to her main ideas, I chose to take a “yes, and” stance. *Yes*, I agree with many of the arguments in Holland's paper. *And*, I think there are deeper theorizations that could be developed. In this paper, I will suggest some potential avenues for further theorization.

DEFINING PEDAGOGY

The first area where I would like to push the theory of a walking education concerns how we define “pedagogy.” Holland's paper uses the term pedagogy in a larger, more encompassing sense of the word; as an act turned toward an educative experience. While Holland draws attention to teachers who are using the act of walking as part of a classroom experience, the bulk of her paper defines a walking education as an emergent moment of learning that happens internally while walking. Holland insists: “It is not that one *aims* at walking as educational, but rather, that it happens organically.”¹ Holland is describing an educative space where the role of “teacher,” as someone who facilitates learning, does not exist. In fact, Holland rejects the idea of a “walking education” as something that requires “instruction and significant support from others,”² where others are understood solely as people. On this view, pedagogy is defined as an educative moment where learning happens through “inward-facing change,”³ rather than through the work of a teacher.

I like the idea that pedagogy can refer to a larger sense of anyone or anything that creates learning. However, there are also moments where it is important to acknowledge the role of the human teacher. We live in a political landscape where the profession of teaching — as something that contains specific skills, strategies, and knowledges around teaching and learning — is being devalued. While there are times that teaching and learning happen organically, there are also many moments where getting a group of people to teach and learn together — facilitating a group discussion, organizing field trips, being the guide on the side or the sage on the stage — requires an enormous amount of effort and skill. While I agree that there are moments where pedagogy should not be seen as distinct from the process of learning and reflecting, there are other moments when, because we must fight for resources or acknowledgement of the hard work that teachers do, pedagogy needs to be defined as the skills and strategies that a *teacher* gains and uses to help facilitate the learning process.

Yes, pedagogy can be done via a walk through nature, *and* I believe a walking education could be further theorized by attending to how a *teacher* might facilitate this. Teachers would need to know whether or not there are landscapes that are safe for walking. Is there a nature preserve close to the school where walking would be safe; or will educative walks take place in a cityscape where the teacher will need to be aware of the safety of her/his students as they cross streets? Will the walk take place through virtually crime free national forest land, or will the walk take place through crime-laden districts? There are some studies that show that walking in nature leads to lower stress and better performance at mental tasks, while walking in crowded city streets actually increases stress and decreases mental concentration and acuity.⁴ Should teachers take this research into consideration as they decide where to hold a walking education? What about the fact that sometimes safety and the ability to “hear” the teaching of the natural world around you is not only dependent on location, but on identity positionality? Are there places for educative walks that might be safe for white males, but that may not be safe if you are female, a person of color, or gay? What about mobility issues? Are there students who cannot walk at all?

UNDULATIONS WHILE WALKING

Another area for further theorization concerns the “active experiencing” and “reflective thinking” that Holland argues for as part of the educative process.⁵ Holland argues that, for walking to be educative, there needs to be a “focus on engagement in a conversation with the present situation.”⁶ She foregrounds the importance of paying attention to one’s surroundings in the moment. Holland describes walking pedagogy as one where an individual is engaged in modes of understanding, attunement, and discourse with those — both human and non-human — around her/him. As I understand it, this type of experience would be one where an individual is intentionally trying to *hear* the world around him/her. The walker is attentive. The walker is looking outward — at the warbler, or the pathway — but then turning inward to reflect on that outward experience. Learning takes place because the walker is in communication with the current experience being had through the walk. I have had these kinds of walks. My experience is that, yes, they are very educative. *And*, sometimes walking can be educative in a different way.

Sometimes I take a walk to hear the birds or the creek. Other times I take a walk because the act of walking seems to facilitate an internal dialogue that may have nothing to do with my surroundings as I am walking. There are times that I am attuned to the world around me, the smell of the pines and junipers, or the steep rise of the trail. There are other times that I barely notice these things because I am working out a complex problem in my head while walking. Without giving any credence to the Cartesian duality of mind as somehow being apart from body, I also want create a space for theorizing those moments where the world seems to recede, where I may not even hear or be aware of what is going on around me because I am so “in my head.” For me, walking can facilitate a concentration on ideas or problems that are not tied to my surroundings. This is not the “priming” for later learning that Holland speaks about. I am not talking about the moments of attunement to nature, nor the increase in concentration or creativity that comes because of physical ex-

ertion earlier in the day. I am trying to make space for something else altogether: for internal dialogue or thought — on anything not just on the experience of one’s surroundings — that is facilitated by movement while one is trying to think. As I reflect on my own walking experiences, I notice that some of my most “productive” walks have been an amalgamation — an undulation — between attunement to my surroundings, attunement to my physical exertion and the movement of my body, and also moments where my mind is focused on some other issue that I am trying to puzzle out. There is an undulation — an ebb and flow — of noticing the song of the birds, noticing the heat or the cold wind, and then also focused concentration on some other issue. My experience says that walking helps with this kind of focused work. However, I have not fully theorized why this might be. Perhaps this is another area for further theorization around a walking education.

WALKING, MOVEMENT, AND INCLUSIVITY

One final area for further theorization might be around the idea of walking itself. Holland’s paper foregrounds experiences toward growth and learning that are had through the activity of walking. However, there are many people who don’t walk. There are many others for whom walking is a painful experience where joints are under constant strain and there is the ever-present fear of falling. Is the educative experience that comes about through walking, described so eloquently by Holland, foreclosed to these people? Is it walking — or even physical exertion — while moving through nature that provides the benefits of communication, learning, and growth, or is it simply movement? Does one need to be outside, or could one be indoors? Holland’s description of walking as a chance for learning, growth, attunement, understanding, and transformation speaks to me; it reflects my own experiences of walking. Yes! Walking can be educative and even transformational. *And*, I also wonder if my days of having those educative experiences are numbered? When I am 90, and perhaps no longer a walker, or maybe I am no longer a person who spends any length of time outside, will this precise mode of education be out of bounds to me? Is this type of education only open to walkers?

Holland’s paper is an excellent step toward theorizing the educative power of walking. Further strides can be made as we build on her work to create a more robust theorization of movement pedagogy.

1. Holland, this volume.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. Gregory N. Bratman, Gretchen C. Daily, Benjamin J. Levy, and James J. Gross, “The Benefits of Nature Experience: Improved Affect and Cognition,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 138 (2015): 41-50.

5. Holland, this volume.

6. Holland, this volume.