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**The Essence of Place – We Make the Road by Walking**

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As we leave 2024 behind and fully envelop 2025, I invite you to think of all the different places you have lived and what comes to mind? I am using the present perfect verb phrase, *have lived*, meaning, to have resided in a place for a period of time, as in a few years. Places of residence for, “a period of time,” may help us to absorb the *essence* of the place. Meaning, these places evoke our feelings and recollections of the stores, the people, streets, homes, parks, vacant lots, and other distinctive places and characteristics that were part of the area. Along with the sights are the feelings associated with them depending on your state of consciousness. Think of the smells, the sounds, the touch and taste of things you were experiencing. And certainly, not everything is beautiful or evokes good feelings and positive emotions.

As a child, I recall doing a lot of walking; most often walking alone to visit my father, or to my aunts and cousins; walking to school; walking to church; and best of all, walking to the beach. As a very perceptive child and a voracious reader with an active imagination, I was always wondering what it would be like to live in this place or that place. A place that, to my mind, appeared nicer than the place where I lived. The outside of these homes seemed always picture perfect, well cared for, the paint on the house always appearing to be fresh and I could see the care that someone had taken to trim the window frames a different vibrant color such as green, pink or orange or the care taken to clean the windows so that they were clear and bright, shining in the sunlight. The yards were well swept, and flowers and trees surrounded the house, making it look like an inviting place to rest and ponder the world. Sometimes, if the front door was opened to let the cool breeze come in, I could see the living and dining rooms. Walking the streets always activated my imagination about the inhabitants who lived there. Walking still does this for me.

My primary school teacher, Mrs. Agnes Richardson, was a singing teacher. She taught us how to sing the multiplication tables and most of all, she enriched our lives by teaching us many folk songs such as *Flow Gently Sweet Afton* (Scottish traditional, words by Robert Burns; arrangement by Carsten Gerlitz); and *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean* (public domain). These songs fueled my imagination and as I walked, I saw the beauty or the potential beauty in the places I passed. The beauty and the *potential* beauty in the places we occupy as educators are central to what I want to say here, on the essence of place and how we make the road by walking.

Walking is travelling in any form, moving and movement, non-static even when we pause for a moment to rest, we are still travelling as our mind is activated. Our work as educators begins with one step at a time, one foot in front of the other if we are mobile, if not, having someone assist with our movement. The English translated poem, *Traveler; your footprints* by Spanish poet, Antonio Machado (2003), inspires the analogy to places, and movement:

Traveler, your footprints  
are the only road, nothing else.  
Traveler, there is no road;  
you make your own path as you walk.  
As you walk, you make your own road,  
and when you look back  
you see the path  
you will never travel again.  
Traveler, there is no road;  
only a ship's wake on the sea.

Myles Horman and Paulo Freire are the conversationalists in “*We make the road by walking, Conversations on education and social change*,” edited by Bell et al., (1990). Horman and Freire expound on the social conditions in their countries, the USA and Brazil, respectively, as they discuss the work they were doing in Tennessee, USA and in northeastern Brazil. The editors noted that the men shared the common characteristics of their countries such as the “sharp dichotomies between rich and poor, powerful and powerless” (p. xviii) and the editors described the convergence of their ideas on literacy, liberation and the critical role of participation in education.

The legacy of Myles Horton and Paulo Freire remain with us today in the work of those educators who teach with a critical eye and reflection for liberation. The editors remind us that underpinning the education activists’ philosophy is, “the idea that knowledge grows from and is a reflection of social experience” (Bell et al., 1990, p. xvi). Some of those social experiences can be garnered with the support of place-based approaches in higher education. Ashley Holmes (2024) states this point thusly:

The communities we come from, the spots we now dwell in, and the streets we move through each day are vitally important to teaching and learning in higher education, both for us as teachers, staff, and administrators and for our students as learners (p. 3).

Imagine walking, not driving, in places where you teach to savor the essence of the places and bringing the peoples, histories and the stories of the places into the classroom. Imagine walking with your students in the areas where you teach and imbibing the essence of the place and carrying that into your course content. On another level, how about including the places to which we have travelled or have lived in our teaching and

imagine how those videos and pictures could be inspirational for our learners (and ourselves)?

Our articles in this edition remind us that we can go places in our learning and teaching online in asynchronous settings as Davis and Allred do in *Multimodal Collaboration Boards in Rural Online Teacher Education* and that we can travel to interesting places in person as York does in *Cultural Contexts: Learning Outside Classroom Walls*. In 2025, let's do more travelling, more learning, more walking, more collaborating in multimodal ways as we teach!

Davis and Allred make it very easy for teacher educators to follow their design to set up multimodal engaging experiences with collaboration boards in Google Slides. They walk us through a very clear approach for making accessible student collaboration in an in-service 100% asynchronous online course on classroom management. They could have simply utilized modules in this asynchronous setting but these professors wanted collaboration and multimodality to be the cornerstone of this course. Multimodality tapped into students' varied experiences and the collaborations allowed them to exchange and learn from each other. A great way to travel online and learn.

York's article, on the other hand, helps us revel in new untraveled places in person. York takes a critical reflexive perspective to her learning from her childhood, her preservice teaching experiences at a school for Indigenous children, and her visits to Norway and India to describe how they impacted her curriculum development as well as her own critical perspective as a white woman. Another great way to travel and learn, in person!

As we make our way in 2025, I encourage each of us to savor the essence of the places we inhabit, help our students to learn those places too, and to travel new vistas with fresh eyes and perspectives. Whether it is online in asynchronous settings or in person experiences, let us,

*Walk Together Children, and Don't Get Weary*", in the words of the old Negro Spiritual, because there is much to fight for and roads of life, teaching and learning to travel.

Many thanks to our reviewers for walking this journey with us! Wishing Everyone a Great 2025!

**We make the road by walking!**

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