

What is a “Walking School”?

A Walking School is a series of walks that act as workshops on a given subject, initiated by an individual or group. The idea is that a subject can be dynamically explored through the process of walking with a group. The Walking School is established as a co-learning process, so that each person’s experiences contribute to the workshop, without a set curriculum other than one prescribed reading made available beforehand. We are not a typical school or training program because of this important factor. We are a learning co-op.

How and why did I come to asking you to help me found The Walking School?

Around 2006 I was walking with an activist Petros Evdokas from Cyprus, who said something to the effect of “This is how philosophy began. It was called ‘Peripatetic Philosophy’. The first Greek philosophers lived on the edge of town and *walked* through the city. They talked and dialogued and drew from what they saw along their walks to illustrate their ideas.” This was my first introduction to the concept of walking and learning together. It was fun to imagine.

This idea of *walking and learning* has appealed to me for several years and I have done walking workshops with artists I call “Walkshops” for walking-workshops since 2007. I even did an entire exhibition of documents from these walks with artists at Portland’s *Project Grow*, an art center for people with diverse abilities, in 2011. Several examples of this series can be found in my book “Student Work”.

I think that now is the time for people to build learning organizations that are co-operative in structure, not necessarily dependent on traditional educational institutions. And, I think there are many people who agree. I know there are many people of all ages who can benefit from a such “Do-It-Together” way of learning. The Walking School is an opportunity for several people to author such a project.

I am informed by the work of Myles Horton, Pablo Freire, and Harrell Fletcher. By the stories of the Highlander Folk School, the Black Mountain College, the Summerhill School, [indymedia.org](http://indymedia.org), “free schools” and the culture around homeschooling, even “unschooling.” Also by the writing of Ivan Illich, John Holt, and Jacque Ranciere (specifically his “The Ignorant School Master”). All of these thinkers and passionate experiments challenge the traditional models of learning. They provoke us to consider that we are equal as individuals and intelligences, that we should not be “stultified” while exploring, that none of us need dominate the other as “teacher” or have the responsibility for learning taken away from us as “students”. I have come to the conclusion that all learning is actually a process of “co-learning” and should be unbounded and essentially open to reinterpretation and structuring from the beginning, and as it goes along, by those who are

learning. Learning is best explored by shared resources, and with the idea that we are all learning from where we are now. That is an excellent basis for learning! A community!

This kind of education is not new, is seen in several established institutions of classroom and curriculum based education... But, my only hope and aim is to help others learn and build their own learning, while exploring learning myself. Walking as a practice also has many historical and contemporary examples. To embrace walking is to engage a tradition and culture around purposeful walking. From the rights to the “commons” and walking in open country, to situationist “psychogeography” and artists like Richard Long who work through walking we are not alone is turning to wandering for inspiration.

The prospect of A Walking School is an interesting one. It presents challenges and apparent obstacles. These can actually be real opportunities. We will mostly be outside. Where do we meet? We will be in a group. How do we learn on the move and together? We want to share and learn. Whom do we invite, and how do we invite them? We want to be open and practical. How will each walk go?

*These walks are not “tours”, instead they are learning co-ops for engaging subjects in our surroundings.*

Okay, I’ve almost said enough. Just a few more things. I am writing this to invite a handful of people to become founders of The Walking School – the very first version of this collective endeavor in 2016. The *founding committee* will author and approve the foundation statement, and the suggested processes surrounding the walks. I am open to ideas, even on basic principles of how this could work. Overall, this school must function based on a foundation that will both keep its spirit and intention intact, and at the same time allow it to adapt and change when needed.

I hope that we as founders can do what each person in each workshop will hopefully do: We can ask any question of any subject, and explore those questions and answers together, no matter our opinion, age, situation or background. In fact, diversity is our greatest ally in learning, because it is at the foundation of community.

Here is my first draft and proposal for what The Walking School can be that will appear in literature and on the web:

*The Walking School is a passionate experiment in learning. We are a per-i·pa·tet·ic school – we learn outside and on the move.*

*Each walk is donation-optional and open to all ages. To find a walk go to our calendar page. Each walk has a reading available on the calendar page. To propose a walk, email our coordinating committee.*

*We are a co-authored because each of us has the power to shape and take responsibility for our learning. Our workshop leaders initiate situations of knowledge-sharing.*

*Walks usually last one to three hours and groups vary in size from five to a dozen people. We usually plan on physically returning as a group to our starting point, but with a new perspective. As we walk, we stay together, but usually form into changing pairs of two and three as we share what we know and each person gets a chance to learn from each other and everyone in the group.*

*We usually meet at a starting point where the workshop initiator proposes a process and potential outcome, a destination for the first half of the walk. Then, a purpose, skill, or goal to achieve by the time the group returns.*

*The shared philosophy of The Walking School is that we find self-learning and the right to chose how and what one learns is a human right. We create safe spaces for people of all ages, identities, and abilities who wish to co-learn with us.*

*We ask three questions of every subject we explore together:*

*\*What is it?*

*\*What do I think of it?*

*\*What can I do with it?*

*The Walking School collects modest donations for time and resources, but no one is turned away for lack of funds. Usually 5-15 dollars.*

*Our workshops can be skill-based, play-based, and are always connected to our surroundings.*

*We are not affiliated with any organization or institution. The Walking School was founded by Avalon Kalin and (insert other founders here). The founding committee is responsible for maintaining the above principles in each workshop year and addressing needs that affect the project as a whole.*

All of this is open to consideration. The Walking School will need several founding voices to establish a strong, dynamic, and friendly basis for a month of workshops. I also propose rigorously documenting and publishing our results.

I hope to see you at the Founder's Walk this May!

Avalon Kalin  
April 15, 2016  
Portland, Oregon

References (in no order)

Myles Horton, *The Long Haul*  
Myles Horton and Paolo Friere, *We Make the Road by Walking*  
Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*  
John Holt, *Escape from Childhood*  
A.S. Neil, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*  
Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*  
July and Fletcher, *Learning to Love You More*  
Harrell Fletcher, *Where I Lived and What I Lived For*  
Ed. by Roert H. Haworth, *Anarchist Pedagogies*  
Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*  
Jacques Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*  
Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*  
Ed. by Billing, Lind, and Nilsson, *Taking Matters Into Common Hands*  
Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*