

Wayfaring and Transport: Negotiating Contradictions in University Adult Education

Donovan Plumb
Mount Saint Vincent University

Abstract: *This paper observes that Tim Ingold's (2007) (2007) analysis of two modes of travel, wayfaring and transport, affords an interesting lens to view current perspectives of learning subtending adult education theory and practice. Ingold contrasts the image of the line as a trace left by an entity wandering through a terrain of lived experience (wayfaring) and the line as something that connects two points across the surface of an abstract space and time (transport). This correlates in interesting ways with the notion of learning as transporting knowledge into students' heads, and the notion of learning as being woven into an ongoing flow of practice. The purpose of this paper is to relate how one university adult educator negotiates the contradictory imperatives of learning as transport and learning as wayfaring in his own practice.*

How we perceive, think, and learn are deeply entwined with our capacities for movement (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). We can bend ourselves (even if it's just shifting our eyes or head) to see or hear better; we can reach out to touch or grasp things in the world; we can move ourselves about by crawling, walking, swimming, pedaling, paddling, wheeling, and so on. As movers, we are not passive in our world. Our capacity to move makes us beings on the go, people with things to do, creatures of impact. We engage with and ensnarl ourselves into the flows of the material world through moving our bodies (including our perceptual and cognitive systems). We wrap ourselves in a scarf to keep out the cold, avoid the glance of a pesky neighbour, stir our soup to keep it from burning, scurry across a road to avoid getting run down. We learn everything in motion (even, as the Buddhist's advise, when still), for it is our outgoing, stretching-forthness, our desire to move, that mobilizes who we are becoming.

Our being in motion makes us beings of space and time ((Harvey, 2000, 2008, 2009; Lefebvre, 1991, 1998). According to anthropologist Tim Ingold (2007), we do not live our lives in place but along a trajectory that becomes tangled with lines of other unfolding worldly processes (including, significantly, the threads of other peoples lives) to form a complex

“meshwork” (Deleuze, 1987) that is the fabric of our lived world. Space and time are important for they form the ineluctable dimensions of our experience – our perceptions, our thoughts, and our conversations. What we know and how we learn are intimately connected with our being in space and time. Moreover, how we think of space and time, how we imagine we are part of the dimensions of existence, deeply affects our conceptions of how we learn and, significantly in the case of adult educators, how we can be involved with the learning of other people.

In this paper, I explore two alternate conceptions of space, time, and movement described by Tim Ingold in *Lines: A Brief History* (2007). Ingold argues that thinking of space, time, and movement in terms of the notion “wayfaring” offers a very different view of things than thinking of them in terms of “transport” (p. 75). I suggest that this is particularly true of learning. The concepts of “wayfaring” and “transport,” I argue, support very different views of what it means to learn ... and what it means to teach.

Transport

According to Ingold (2007), in the modern world, the way we understand space, time, and movement is captured by the term, “transport.” In this view, we conceive the world, first, as an abstract and unobstructed surface, like a blank piece of paper, or, if we have the entire earth in mind, like a smooth globe. Upon this surface, we can then inscribe lines and coordinates that can help us determine the places of things (like cities and mountains). Movement, in this view, is a process that transpires between different points on this surface. It is the thing we do to get from one place to the next, and, with the help of technologies like cartography, compasses, rulers, and measures of velocity, we can move with most efficiency across any span between points of the globe.

According to geographer, David Harvey (1989), the notion of absolute space and time, elucidated so powerfully by thinkers like Descartes and Newton,

accorded strongly with the rise of capitalist enterprise. The need for efficient control of space and time to reduce the “friction of distance” (p. 211) and increase the speed of transporting capitalist goods (including labour power), drove commanders of the British Navy, for instance, to supplant “traditional seafaring skills in favour of an instrumental calculus of point-to-point navigation” (Ingold, 2007, p. 77). The absolute notion of space and time also served ‘rulers’ interested in regularizing the boundaries and lines of transport joining different points of their territory. At a much smaller scale, captains of industry designed assembly-line factories with transport in mind. By reducing the distance between points of productive activity, and then systematically shunting goods from point to point, managers could coordinate the labour of thousands of workers and efficiently produce complex products.

The space and time between points of transport, Ingold observes, count only as something to be overcome. On the assembly-line, time between points of processing is wasted time and on the high seas, time between coasts is money lost. Travelers engaged in transport typically experience the time spent moving to their destination as something to be endured. Rather than remaining engaged with the environment flowing by their windows, most often, the time cocooned in their car, train sleeper, or airplane seat is passed pursuing other activities (sleeping, ideally) until their destination is reached and full living can once again resume.

The prominence of transport leads to other understandings. Ingold (2007) relates how viewing space and time as an assembly of connected places encourages a sense of the world as a network of points and lines of transport. Although this more relative view supplants the older linear view of transport in which things (or people) are moved from point to point along a single line (like the assembly-line), the network view still presents a rather flat depiction of life in all the spaces between network nodes.

Wayfaring

Whereas the view of transport is relatively recent, the view of wayfaring is much more ancient. This is the view of the world that prevails amongst indigenous peoples, and perhaps for us, too, in our everyday dealings with the world.

“The wayfarer,” Ingold (2007) observes, “is instantiated in the world as a line of travel” (p. 75). The wayfarer wanders the world on a path without beginning or end. He or she is always “somewhere” but, as Ingold relates, “every ‘somewhere’ is on the way to

somewhere else” (p. 81). Along the way, the wayfarer is always present and engaged with where they are. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Igloodik, Claudio Aporta reports that, for the inhabitants of this community, “travelling ... was not a transitional activity between one place and another, but a way of being ... The act of travelling to a particular location plays a part in defining who the traveller is” (Aporta in Ingold, 2007, p. 76). For the wayfarer, the point of movement is to engage with their world. A hunter or gatherer walks a path not just to reach a specific place but to apply their skills and sensitivities to their environment in ways that enables them to gain sustenance along the way. A path, therefore, is not so much a channel for getting from one place to another but a “conduit of inscribed activity” that is intrinsically part of (or interwoven with) who the wanderer is.

For the wayfarer, space and time are not something to move across, but to “thread one’s way *through*” (Ingold, p. 79). As Ingold relates:

Indeed for the wayfarer the world, as such, has no surface. Of course he encounters surfaces of diverse kinds – of solid ground, water, vegetation and so on. Indeed it is largely thanks to the way these surfaces respond to light, sound and the pressure of touch that he perceived the world in the way he does. They are surfaces, however, *in* the world, not *of* it ... And woven into their very texture, and thence into the country itself, are the lines of growth and movement of its inhabitants. Every such line is tantamount to a way of life. (pp. 79-80)

The world of the wayfarer, then, is a world that is dwelled within. Space and time are not abstract and a person does not find her way in the world simply by remembering points along the way (how would one know what way to go next if our memories were just still scenes?). Rather, space and time are remembered in motion, not as abstract spaces, but as paths on which we move along. Finding our way is not stop and go. As Ingold (2000) relates in another context, “the notion of ‘finding’ has here to be understood in its original sense of exploratory movement, at once improvisatory and assured, guided by past experience and by a continual monitoring of fluctuations not only in the pattern of reflected light but also in the sounds and ‘feel’ of the environment” (p. 239). Through dwelling in the world and through laying down overlapping and intertwining paths, people sensuously weave themselves and their environment together, changing both along the way. As Ingold observes:

The world is *not* ready-made for life to occupy. Contrary to the assumptions of cartographers ... life is

not contained within things, nor is it transported about. It is rather laid down along paths of movement, of action and perception. Every living being, accordingly, grows and reaches out into the environment along the sum of its paths. To find one's way is to advance along a line of growth, in a world which is never quite the same from one moment to the next, and whose future configuration can never be fully known. Ways of life are not therefore determined in advance, as routes to be followed, but have continually to be worked out anew. And these ways, far from being inscribed upon the surface of an inanimate world, are the very threads from which the living world is woven. (Ingold, 2000, p. 242).

Learning as Transport and Learning as Wayfaring

The shift from an ancient understanding of space, time, and movement present in wayfaring to a more hurried and superficial understanding present in transport, I would argue, also manifests in how we think of learning. Thus, as one might expect that from the transport view, we see learning as the movement of something (this time, knowledge) between two points – the holder of a stock of knowledge (perhaps a teacher's head, or maybe a textbook) into the mind of the learner. Just like the Naval commander, the task of the educator imbued with the notion of transport is to clearly define both the point of departure and the point of arrival of the educational enterprise and to develop instruments for affecting the transport and ascertaining the delivery of knowledge.

This view of learning accords strongly with what Paulo Freire (2004a, 2004b) criticizes as the “banking concept” of education in which “the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat” (2004b, p. 72). Students are viewed as passive beings stripped of their capacity for “praxis,” the “restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry [that] human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). In the banking view, students are seen to be as passive, unengaged, and un-moving objects.

The transport view of learning also accords with what Lave and Wenger (1991) characterize as the “conventional explanation” of learning that views it “as a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge, whether ‘discovered,’ ‘transmitted’ from others, or ‘experienced in interaction’ with others” (p. 47). Like Freire, Lave and Wenger question the narrowness of this vision preferring to view humans as much more broadly engaged in practices. “Theorizing in terms of practice, or praxis, ... requires a broad view of human agency ... emphasizing the integration in

practice of agent, world, and activity” (p. 50). Although Freire and Lave and Wenger attend to underlying notions of space and time (verbs like receive, deposit, internalize and transmit all describe motion in space and time consistent with transport), they do not elaborate an explicit geographical analysis of the process of learning. As such, in their accounts, the emergence of education is not seen as part of capitalism's much more pervasive transformation of space and time for the purpose of maximizing the circulation of commodities.

The notion of wayfaring offers a very different basis for understanding learning. Rather than conceptualizing learning as a process of transporting ideas into the head of a learner, the notion of wayfaring conceptualizes learning very differently as a process of ongoing engagement and entanglement of a human being with the world as they move along the path of life. Learners are not still, like nodes in a network awaiting receipt of information. The world of learning is not a smooth surface upon which knowledge can be mapped and then moved around. Rather, learners are beings in motion constantly engaged in a process of enskillment that tunes their bodies and minds (surfaces in their own right) to the ever transforming surfaces of the world. Thus, we do not carry knowledge in our heads – it is not something that lies on the surface, like houses on the map of the world. Instead, knowledge is ‘a conduit of inscribed activity’ that we develop and follow throughout our lives.

Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, and Lave and Wenger's practice-based theory of learning in communities of practice, are consistent with this wayfaring view. Instead of being passive vessels, Freire insists that humans are active and creative agents, responsible for their own growth and development. Lave and Wenger (1991) offer a similar analysis:

A theory of social practice emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing.... This view also claims that learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. (pp. 50-51)

As I have noted in another context (Plumb, 2008), through wayfaring:

we bring the emergent, developing capacities of our bodies and the unfolding powers, regularities and unpredictability of nature and society into productive, creative relation. Because of our practical engagement in the world, both we and the world transform. The world of natural and cultural artifacts is diverted by our energies into new patterns

that become the environment for subsequent engagements by us and others. At the same time, our own bodies are diverted by our practices to develop new patterns and powers that become the basis for future engagements with the world. (p. 74).

Wayfaring and Transport in a Contested Terrain

The process of learning as a kind of transport and as a kind of wayfaring exist simultaneously and often in conflict in formal educational contexts. This manifests most clearly in the conflicts that students and educators experience between meeting the requirements for credentials (transport) and in engaging in meaningful or transformative process of ongoing learning. Whereas the arrival at a particular state of knowing was once the side-effect (often unintended) of a process of intellectual wayfaring, all too often, in our current educational environment, structured as it is by the instrumental imperatives of the capitalist nation-state, engaged learning, if experienced at all, is the diminished side-effect of achieving a credential.

Promoting a wayfaring view of learning has had dramatic repercussions for and educators teaching practice. Rather than viewing students as vessels to be filled or objects to be shaped (like one might sharpen a knife), one views them as people with long histories of wayfaring seeking connection to new practices. The goal of the wayfaring educator is to generate a context that facilitates their linking up to or falling into harmony with these practices.

There are a few things to keep in mind. First, one should try to remember that people are already engaged in wayfaring and have a history that can both enable and constrain their connecting up (physically,

emotionally, socially, cognitively, culturally) with new practices. As such, it is important to offer connection points that can help wayfarers link what they know, who they are, and the things they can do to the practices they are not yet fully part of.

Second, a wayfaring educator should be mindful of how emotionally difficult wayfaring can be and try to create as warm and supportive learning context for wayfarers. Asking someone to learn something new, especially something significant or meaningful, necessarily disrupts the way she previously dwelled in the world. As people forever in the process of becoming, wayfarers cannot expect to be perfect. It is all right, for instance, not to understand or to feel lost. This, for wayfarers, is part of the process of linking up with a new practice.

Third, wayfaring educators should try to remember the political nature of learning. Wayfaring requires us to encounter powerful forces that shape our social interactions. A wayfaring educator should remain mindful of how interpersonal relations connect to and are influenced by broader historical and cultural power relations (gender, race, sexual orientation, class, etc.), and how even these are affected by larger global social phenomena (geo-political conflict, capitalism, environmental degradation).

Fourth, and finally, while one should recognize the importance of learning in formal contexts, a wayfaring educator should remember the pervasiveness of life-long learning processes. Teaching and learning are part of our social interactions in all of our communities of practice. Wayfaring, in other words, is not a job but a way of being.

References

- Deleuze, G. (1987). *A thousand plateaus : capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Freire, P. (2004a). *Pedagogy of hope : reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed* ([New ed.]). New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2004b). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th ed.). New York: Continuum.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity : an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (2000). *Spaces of Hope* (1st ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Harvey, D. (2008). The Right to the City. *New Left Review*, 53. Retrieved from <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2740>
- Harvey, D. (2009). *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ingold, T. (2000). *The perception of the environment essays on livelthood, dwelling & skill*. London: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. (2007). *Lines : a brief history*. New York: Routledge.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *Critique of everyday life*. London: Verso.
- Lefebvre, H. (1998). *The production of space*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Plumb, D. (2008). Learning as dwelling. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 40, 62-79.