Pedagogies of Hope conference submission

Dr. Rachel Epp Buller

[photo of students walking submitted]

Finding Hope through a Pedagogy of Walking

I teach Visual Arts and Design at a small liberal arts college in Kansas, in a rural area of the US Midwest. For the last several years, I have sought to combat the prevalence of loneliness and isolation by promoting human and more-than-human connections through walking encounters inside and outside of classroom time. I assign students to go on walks by themselves, repeatedly, along the same paths so that they learn to know a specific local ecology in a more familiar way. I ask students to go on walks with each other to discuss a class reading or to think together about a question raised in class, getting to know each other in new ways. I invite students to go on a series of walks with children, elders, neighbors, and friends, where they might build and strengthen relational connections. And in each activity, I emphasize "walking" as an accessible method of learning: I have had students "go for a walk" in a wheelchair, on a kneeling scooter, or while pushing a stroller. "Walking," in this broad conception, is a means of movement through which students might listen to themselves and their own thoughts, make connections with another person, or begin to take better notice of the plant-kin living all around them.

In an ongoing collaboration with Dr. Sheena Wilson at the University of Alberta, we have been pursuing walking in our two local communities as a method for connecting and for taking action on climate. Our preliminary research will be published in the edited collection (forthcoming January 2027), *Walking the Talk: Climate Moves and Relational Attunement*.

Bio submitted:

Dr. Rachel Epp Buller appreciates moving between her roles as a visual and sound artist, an art historian, an educator, and a gallery director. She is also a two-time Fulbright Scholar committed to cross-cultural exchange, a long-distance walker, and a certified practitioner in Deep Listening, all of which she brings to her classroom teaching. Her forthcoming (2027) monograph is entitled Listening as Artistic Practice: Essays and Invitations.