

EDUCATION

IN MOTION: COMMUNITY WALKS AS A LEARNING AND SOCIAL CONNECTION STRATEGY

EDUCACIÓN EN MOVIMIENTO: CAMINATAS COMUNITARIAS COMO ESTRATEGIA DE APRENDIZAJE Y CONEXIÓN SOCIAL

Magali Ortiz-Bravo¹

E-mail: magaliortizbravo@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5294-8810>

Rosa Elena Durán-González¹

E-mail: rdurango@uaeh.edu.mx

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8121-5019>

Lydia Raesfeld¹

E-mail: lydiaraesfeld@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2589-9628>

Graciela Amira Medécigo-Shej¹

E-mail: amirashej@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6449-9136>

¹ Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. México.

Submission: 01/28/2025

Acceptance: 03/21/2025

Publication: 01/05/2025

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the educational potential of community walks at Ignacio Zaragoza Community Secondary School in Mexico. The walks not only allow students to explore their surroundings but also provide a unique experience of connection with their community. From a theoretical perspective, these walks are based on multiple pedagogical approaches, including Critical Pedagogy and Constructivism. Furthermore, ethnography plays a fundamental role, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of their environment. This qualitative study, based on action research methodology, uses surveys and community walks as methods. These walks become a means to gather community needs and issues and disseminate relevant information. The results highlight economic and social challenges, as well as the importance of community engagement. Solutions, such as informational talks, workshops, and dialogues, are proposed to address these identified problems. This study highlights the importance of community walks as a pedagogical strategy that connects students with their community, promoting critical reflection and meaningful learning.

Keywords:

Community participation, community walks, environment.

Suggested citation (APA, seventh edition)

Ortiz-Bravo, M., Durán-González, R. E., Raesfeld, L., & Medécigo-Shej, G. A. (2025). Education in motion: Community walks as a learning and social connection strategy. *Sophia Research Review*, 2(2), 5-9.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo examina el potencial educativo de las caminatas comunitarias en la Secundaria Comunitaria Ignacio Zaragoza, en México. Las caminatas no solo permiten a los estudiantes explorar su entorno, sino que también les brindan una experiencia única de conexión con su comunidad. Desde una perspectiva teórica, estas caminatas se basan en múltiples enfoques pedagógicos, incluyendo la Pedagogía Crítica y el Constructivismo. Además, la etnografía desempeña un papel fundamental, ya que permite a los estudiantes comprender más profundamente su entorno. Este estudio cualitativo, basado en la metodología de investigación-acción, utiliza como métodos, la encuesta y las caminatas comunitarias. Estas caminatas se convierten en un medio para recopilar necesidades y problemáticas de la comunidad y difundir información relevante. Los resultados resaltan desafíos económicos y sociales, así como la importancia de la participación comunitaria. Se proponen soluciones, como charlas informativas, talleres y diálogos, para abordar estos problemas identificados. Este estudio destaca la relevancia de las caminatas comunitarias como una estrategia pedagógica que conecta a los estudiantes con su comunidad, promoviendo la reflexión crítica y el aprendizaje significativo.

Palabras clave:

Participación comunitaria, caminatas comunitarias, entorno.



INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education faces the challenge of transcending traditional classrooms and generating meaningful experiences that connect students with their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings. In this sense, the relationship between school and community becomes a central element for comprehensive education, as it allows for the development of cognitive, social, and ethical competencies, as well as fostering active participation and critical awareness in students (Díaz-Barriga, 2006; Freire, 1982, 2000, 2006).

Pedagogical strategies oriented toward community education therefore seek not only to transmit knowledge, but also to build citizenship and promote social justice.

Barberán-Santana et al.'s (2023) study on the "Pedagogical Path" offers an innovative perspective on the integration of educational strategies that combine theory with practice, promoting active and meaningful learning. The authors highlight how educational experiences that transcend the classroom allow students to directly engage with their environment, strengthening their critical understanding of content and fostering the construction of autonomous knowledge.

This approach aligns directly with the idea of community walks, as they not only encourage exploration of the territory and interaction with the community, but also foster processes of reflection and analysis that enrich the educational experience and enhance students' active participation in their own learning.

Torres Carrillo's (2017) analysis of educational practices in social movements in Latin America demonstrates how non-formal education and community experiences can be vehicles for social transformation and citizenship strengthening. The author emphasizes that contextualized education, which connects students with real-life problems and community actors, fosters skills in critical analysis, cooperation, and social awareness.

This theoretical approach supports the relevance of community walks as a pedagogical tool, as they allow students to identify local needs, understand social dynamics, and participate in the construction of collective solutions, effectively integrating education with community life.

For their part, Rodríguez-Miranda et al. (2022) highlights the importance of learning through playful strategies as a mechanism to promote cognitive and socio-emotional skills, especially in environmental education contexts. The authors show that experiential activities, which involve exploration, interaction, and observation of the environment, contribute to the development of a critical awareness of the environment and sustainability. This approach complements the pedagogical value of community walks, as it allows students not only to acquire knowledge but also to internalize values of environmental care and social responsibility, strengthening their understanding of the

relationship between the community and the physical environment they inhabit.

Finally, Figueroa-Martínez's (2023) work on walking in vulnerable neighborhoods in Santiago provides a perspective focused on the social and urban dimensions of these educational experiences. The author demonstrates that the walks allow participants to observe and analyze the reality of their surroundings, including aspects of inequality, urban structures, and community practices.

This research highlights that walking is both a learning exercise and a tool for fostering empathy, social awareness, and active participation in community improvement. Applied to the context of community education in Mexico, this approach shows that walking not only enriches academic training but also strengthens civic engagement and students' ability to critically and constructively intervene in their social environment.

Within this framework, community education emerges as an approach that recognizes the school as a meeting place between institutional and local knowledge, valuing the culture, traditions, and needs of the community. The National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE) Subsystem in Mexico, through its Community Secondary Schools, has implemented various programs aimed at strengthening this link, promoting educational practices that connect students with their immediate surroundings and encourage them to actively participate in improving their community (Méjico. Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 2016; Méjico. Secretaría de Educación Pública-Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 2022).

In this context, community walks are presented as an innovative pedagogical strategy that allows students to explore their territory, identify local issues, and connect direct experience with reflective learning processes. These walks not only facilitate contact with the physical and social environment but also foster critical awareness, collaboration, and community engagement. From the perspective of Critical Pedagogy, the walks align with Freire's vision, seeking to empower students by questioning inequalities and understanding the power dynamics present in their context (Freire, 1982, 2000, 2006).

Likewise, from a constructivist perspective, these experiences offer students the opportunity to construct their own knowledge through direct interaction with their surroundings and community. Observation, interaction, and dialogue during the walks allow for the generation of authentic and meaningful learning, strengthening students' critical thinking and analytical skills. Ethnography, as a methodological tool, plays a central role, facilitating a deeper understanding of local culture and social practices, promoting an appreciation for diversity and respect for community voices (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984).

At the "Ignacio Zaragoza" Community Secondary School (CCT13KTV0080L), part of the National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE) subsystem, community walks have been implemented as an educational initiative to enrich students' learning by linking theory and practice and encouraging active community participation. These experiences contribute to building shared knowledge, strengthening social cohesion, and developing key competencies for civic life and environmental sustainability.

The objective of this paper is to explore the relevance of these walks as a pedagogical strategy, highlighting how they contribute to the understanding of power dynamics, social justice, and authentic learning, within a community education framework that integrates theory, practice, and social engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach based on action research methodology to explore and understand the educational impact of community walks at the Ignacio Zaragoza Community Secondary School, part of the National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE) subsystem. Participant observation was used, following the model proposed by Bogdan & Taylor (1984), as the main tool for data collection, allowing researchers and students to actively immerse themselves in the community, interact with its members, and record experiences and perceptions about the social and educational environment.

The research was carried out in three phases: planning and preparation, where clear objectives were defined and participants were selected; community walks, which provided a direct and detailed view of local life; and analysis and systematization of the information, through data categorization and the identification of patterns, needs, and opportunities, which allowed for the generation of educational action proposals.

Additionally, surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of student and teacher perspectives, ensuring data triangulation and strengthening the study's validity. This methodology integrates theory and practice, promoting critical reflection, meaningful learning, and active collaboration between the school and the community, demonstrating the pedagogical value of community walks as a strategy for connecting students with their environment.

DEVELOPMENT

Participant observation methodology, as proposed by Bogdan & Taylor (1984), is a fundamental tool for researching community walks, as it allows for a direct and contextualized approach to educational and social reality. This approach enables not only the collection of data on students' actions and perceptions, but also an understanding of the cultural, economic, and social

contexts that influence their learning and community dynamics. The application of this methodology at the "Ignacio Zaragoza" Community Secondary School allowed for the integration of pedagogical practice with educational research, generating deeper and more situated knowledge that goes beyond traditional observation methods.

The implementation of the methodology was structured into three main phases: planning, execution, and analysis. The planning phase involved precisely defining the objectives of the walks, selecting representative participants, and structuring strategic observation routes that would allow coverage of various sectors of the community. During this stage, data collection instruments, such as observation guides, questionnaires, and field diaries, were developed to systematize the information and ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

The planning also included preliminary meetings with teachers, students, and community members, with the aim of raising awareness among all participants about the research objectives, fostering their commitment, and ensuring ethical and responsible participation. This phase is key, as it establishes a solid framework that allows the walk to be guided with purpose and pedagogical coherence, ensuring that each activity contributes to the development of critical, reflective, and social skills in students.

During the implementation phase, the community walk became a space for active immersion, where students and researchers shared experiences and observations in real time. Direct interaction with community members allowed them to identify everyday problems, local resources, power relations, and cultural practices, providing a comprehensive view of community life. This close contact facilitated the students' application of Freire's Critical Pedagogy principles, questioning structures of inequality and reflecting on the implications of these inequities for education and local development. Likewise, the constructivist approach gained relevance by allowing students to construct their own knowledge from direct experience, relating their observations to previously learned theoretical concepts, and fostering meaningful learning.

Ethnography, as a central component of the walks, offered a methodological framework for understanding the community from within, valuing the voices and experiences of its inhabitants. Through observation and interaction, students were able to analyze traditions, social practices, and historical contexts that shape life in Los Arcos, Acatlán, Hidalgo. This approach not only strengthened students' cultural understanding but also promoted the development of critical analysis skills, empathy, and respect for social diversity. For example, by recording testimonies from families and community leaders, students identified specific needs in areas such as security, health, and environmental education,

which allowed them to propose more effective and contextualized intervention strategies.

The analysis of the collected data constituted the third phase of the methodology, in which the information obtained was systematized, coded, and evaluated to identify patterns, trends, and recurring issues. This process allowed for the correlation of observations with theoretical frameworks, highlighting how community walks foster critical awareness, social participation, and ethical reflection. The results obtained revealed the importance of involving the entire community in the creation of Local Learning Content (LLC), emphasizing that community education cannot be understood as a unilateral process, but rather as a shared construction that integrates the knowledge, experiences, and needs of students, teachers, and local residents.

Community walks also demonstrated their value in raising environmental awareness and educating for sustainability. By exploring natural and urban spaces, students were able to observe the relationship between the community and the environment, identify problems of pollution and degradation, and reflect on the importance of sustainable practices. This component promotes experiential learning, where direct experience becomes a driving force for developing responsible attitudes and developing environmentally conscious citizens.

Furthermore, participant observation strengthened students' social and civic skills, as interaction with the community fostered effective communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and empathy. These skills are fundamental to the comprehensive development of young people, as they prepare them to face social challenges in an ethical, responsible, and collaborative manner. At the same time, community participation in the walks ensured that the research results were validated and contextualized, creating a bond of trust and collaboration between the school and local residents.

The experience developed at the Ignacio Zaragoza Community Secondary School demonstrates that community walks not only enrich formal education but also allow students to actively engage in improving their environment. The identification of priority areas of focus, such as safety, health, employment, and environmental education, underscores the need for comprehensive educational strategies that combine theory, practice, and social participation. In this way, the walks not only generate academic learning but also promote social responsibility, civic engagement, and the development of more equitable and sustainable communities.

The application of participant observation methodology in community walks offers a solid pedagogical model that integrates research, educational practice, and community engagement. This methodology demonstrates that education can transcend the

classroom and become a transformative tool, where students become active agents of change, capable of critically analyzing their environment, identifying problems, and proposing solutions. Furthermore, it reinforces the idea that collaboration between school and community is essential to generating meaningful learning, promoting social justice, and strengthening students' holistic development, directly contributing to the well-being of the community as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

The community walks implemented at Ignacio Zaragoza Community Secondary School have proven to be an effective pedagogical strategy for connecting students with their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings. This practice not only allows for the construction of authentic and meaningful knowledge through direct interaction with the community, but also strengthens cognitive, social, and civic competencies, promoting critical awareness, active participation, and a commitment to improving the environment. By integrating theory and practice, these walks demonstrate that community education can transcend the confines of the classroom and become a transformative tool for students' holistic development and social cohesion.

The application of participant observation and ethnography in community walks highlights the importance of considering education as a shared process between school and community. This methodology allows for the identification of local needs, social problems, and opportunities for improvement, generating contextualized and relevant educational strategies. It also fosters collaboration between students, teachers, and community members, consolidating an educational model that promotes social justice, sustainability, and the development of more equitable and responsible communities.

REFERENCES

Barberán-Santana, E. V., Barberán-Tejena, G. T., Zambrano-Delgado, M. D. L., & Mera-Chispe, E. G. (2023). Sendero pedagógico: Una nueva estrategia educativa en el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje. *Ciencias de la Educación*, 8(9), 1782–1794. <https://doi.org/10.23857/pc.v8i9.6157>

Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. J. (1984). La observación participante en el campo. Introducción a los métodos cualitativos de investigación. La búsqueda de significados. Paidós.

Díaz-Barriga, F. (2006). Enseñanza situada: vínculo entre la escuela y la vida. McCraw-Hill.

Figueroa-Martínez, C. (2023). Entre lo social y lo construido: Comprendiendo la caminata en barrios vulnerables de Santiago. *Revista de Urbanismo*, (49), 21–41. <https://doi.org/10.5354/0717-5051.2023.69411>

Freire, P. (1982). Pedagogía del oprimido. Siglo XXI.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogía del oprimido*. WW Norton & Company.

Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogía de la autonomía*. Siglo XXI.

México. Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo.

(2016). Marco Curricular de la Educación Comunitaria Modelo ABCD. CONAFE. https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/411245/Marco_Curricular.pdf

México. Secretaría de Educación Pública- Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo. (2022). Contenidos Locales para el aprendizaje (CLA). SEP-CONAFE.

<https://sites.google.com/conafe.nuevaescuela.mx/conafehidalgo/p%C3%A1gina-principal/contenidos-locales-de-aprendizaje-cla>

Rodríguez-Miranda, R., Palomo-Cordero, L., Padiña-Mora, M., Corrales-Vargas, A., & van Wendel de Joode, B. (2022). Aprendizaje a través de estrategias lúdicas: una herramienta para la Educación Ambiental. *Revista de ciencias ambientales*, 56(1), 209–228. <https://doi.org/10.15359/rca.56-1.10>

Torres Carrillo, A. (2017). Prácticas educativas en movimientos sociales de América Latina. *Folios*, 46, 3–14. <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3459/345951474001/html>

Conflicts of Interest:

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions:

Lissette Carolina Zambrano-Sanguinetti: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, supervision, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, and writing, review, and editing.