

# Walking Through Housing History: Creative Histories Beyond the Classroom

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## Abstract

How might walking be used to support a creative and historically informed approach to learning about public health, environmental health and housing and take students beyond the traditional confines of the classroom? In this article, we discuss the development and delivery of a North London walking tour close to a university campus. We build upon critical pedagogies of walking and the development of a historical awareness of housing as a method for teaching students on Public and Environmental Health and Housing courses. We argue firstly for the importance of developing a creative approach to learning, and secondly for the use of ‘learning walks’ as a pedagogical tool for exploring, observing and paying attention to the environment, using these to increase students’ historical awareness of housing and public health to inform their future professional practice.

Degree courses in environmental health and housing are traditionally seen as ‘scientific’, but there has been a growing interest in supporting students on these courses firstly to think more broadly about art, culture, architecture and history and, secondly, to understand how these have an impact on health in the broadest sense.<sup>1</sup> This interest led to a series of collaborations between the authors – a lecturer in public health, environmental health and housing, and a museum curator – over several years. Our collaboration has included student visits to the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA) at Middlesex University; visits to archives, museums and galleries elsewhere in London (such as the Wellcome Collection, the Science Gallery at Kings College London, and the Building Research Establishment); the use of photovoice projects within the curriculum<sup>2</sup>; and visits to local housing estates. These teaching interventions represented an approach that emphasized placing students at the centre of their learning and getting them out of the traditional classroom environment to learn in a more creative and enquiring way.

This article describes one of our teaching collaborations undertaken during the 2022–23 academic year, the development of a short walking tour close to a London university campus, which was the culmination of the approach we had developed through our earlier work together. Here, we build upon critical pedagogies of walking and the development of a historical awareness of housing as a method for teaching students on Public and Environmental Health and Housing courses. We argue firstly

<sup>1</sup> Jim Gritton, Jill Stewart, Charlotte Jeavons, Nevin Mehmet and Vincent La Placa, ‘Movies in the classroom: Lessons for curriculum design’, *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* 8/12 (2016), <<https://doi.org/10.21100/compass.v8i12.272>>.

<sup>2</sup> Namita N. Manohar, Dana Berkowitz, JeffriAnne Wilder and Justine E. Tinker, ‘Photovoice: A critical pedagogical assignment in the sociology classroom’, *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, 5/1–2 (2013), pp. 36–51.

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for the importance of developing a creative approach to learning, and secondly for the use of 'learning walks' as a pedagogical tool for exploring, observing and paying attention to the environment, using these to increase students' historical awareness of housing and public health to inform their future professional practice.

With previous cohorts of students, we had visited MoDA to introduce them to historical documentation about housing development, such as house builders' brochures from the 1930s. It was therefore a logical next step to ask students to look at examples of those kinds of houses, and others, in the local built environment. The aim was to develop students' understanding of housing in relation to health and to engage with housing and its environment in an immersive way. Middlesex University's campus is set within one of London's outer suburbs, surrounded by a rich mixture of different housing types, including some dating back to the 1600s. It therefore provided a useful and accessible case study for students to consider the diversity of housing within a small radius.

In previous years, we had led students on an in-person walking tour around the area with the aim of looking at housing, understanding historic styles and potential problems. However, an increase in student numbers meant that such tours were no longer practical, since the group had become too large to fit comfortably on narrow pavements, and for the tutor to be heard above the noise of traffic. There was, therefore, a need for a walk which could be done by students independently, rather than led by a tutor. This meant we could approach it in a fresh, innovative way, drawing on primary evidence from the MoDA archive and beyond, and linking this to what the students could see around them. We were inspired by the approach pioneered by Jane Jacobs, who argued that cities cannot be understood through theory learned in the classroom alone, but instead that:

The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behaviour of cities is, I think, to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as is possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them.<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind, we hoped to encourage students to undertake a form of creative historical enquiry through walking, fostering a sense of curiosity about their surroundings and the habit of noticing both specific housing types and their place within the wider environment.

### **Creative pedagogies**

We drew on several strands of pedagogical thinking to bring together ideas around creativity, the learning benefits of walking and the development of historical awareness. Firstly, we used the work of Norman Jackson and Malcolm Shaw, who argue that creativity in higher education is discipline-specific, albeit with some commonalities between disciplines.<sup>4</sup> We saw students on environmental health and housing courses as needing to develop their creative thinking skills because, during their professional careers, they will frequently be required to make sense of highly complex situations, and to combine rational thinking with divergent and associative thinking. Common amongst Jackson and Shaw's definitions of creativity are an expectation of imaginative and original thought: the idea of exploring for the purpose

<sup>3</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London, 2020), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Jackson, and Malcolm Shaw, 'Developing subject perspectives on creativity in higher education', in Norman Jackson, Martin Oliver, Malcolm Shaw and James Wisdon (eds), *Developing Creativity in Higher Education: An Imaginative Curriculum* (London, 2006), pp. 89–108.

of discovery, and the capacity to connect things learnt in one situation and apply them to other situations. The practice of environmental and public health requires the ability to deal with challenges that are new, unpredictable, emergent and highly complex because of the many regulatory, social and human factors involved. This kind of thinking is, by definition, creative. We argue that practitioners need the ability to recognize how a particular situation has arisen, drawing on a broad historical understanding, and to propose solutions that have not necessarily been tried before, using skills of creative, divergent thinking, risk-taking and experimentation.

In this walking tour, we hoped to encourage students to develop a further aspect of creative thought, namely: 'Being curious with an enquiring disposition – willing to explore, experiment and take risks.'<sup>5</sup> Although the outcomes of the walk may not appear to be conventionally 'creative' (in the sense of requiring students to make something with their hands or generate something new), we hoped to foster a creative, enquiring attitude and to motivate students to develop their ability to search purposefully in appropriate ways. As Jackson notes: 'It is necessary to work in an uncertain world and this often requires people to move from the known to the unknown.'<sup>6</sup> We also drew on the ideas of James Kaufman and Ronald Beghetto who distinguish between 'Big-C' creative genius and 'little-C' everyday creativity. They propose a further category of 'Pro-C' in recognition of the professional creativity attained by individuals who are accomplished in their field but not necessarily groundbreaking.<sup>7</sup> We suggest that 'Pro-C' is the category to which we students should aspire, demonstrating creative enquiry alongside professional competence.

## Pedagogies of walking

There is much to support the suggestion that walking promotes learning. Some of the world's greatest thinkers have been aware of the power of walking to spark creativity: Charles Darwin, for example, created a 'thinking path' around his garden at Down House, since he found that walking aided his process of thinking.<sup>8</sup> Neuroscientists agree that the action of walking has a positive impact on our brains, enabling us to think more creatively, and that this effect is enhanced by the act of walking together.<sup>9</sup> More specifically in the context of higher education, Karein K. Goertz has drawn attention to the benefits of walking for students' mental health and wellbeing.<sup>10</sup> Alan Bairner argues that the benefits of walking go beyond the health of the individual, emphasizing the importance of the walker's engagement with society, and suggesting that:

It is on the street that we most directly experience what it is like to live with strangers. Young people cannot be expected to uncover fundamental truths about the cities and towns in which they walk. However, they will have greater ownership of the reality that they create whilst walking than of the 'realities' that are produced for them by the media

<sup>5</sup> Norman Jackson, 'Developing professional capability through lifewide education with a focus on students' creative development', available via the 'Learning to be professional through a higher education' wiki (Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education, 2011) <<http://learningtobeprofessional.pbworks.com/w/page/15914947/FrontPage>> [accessed 03 January 2025].

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> James Kaufman and Ronald Beghetto, 'Beyond big and little: The Four C model of creativity', *Review of General Psychology*, 13/1 (2009), pp. 1–12.

<sup>8</sup> English Heritage, 'The garden at Down House', <<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/history/garden-highlights/>> [accessed 03 January 2025].

<sup>9</sup> Shane O'Mara, *In Praise of Walking: The New Science of How We Walk and Why It's Good for Us* (London, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Karein K Goertz, 'Walking as pedagogy', in Colin Michael Hall, Yael Ram and Noam Shoval (eds), *The Routledge International Handbook of Walking* (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 55–64.

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and culture industries. In sum, walking teaches us more than any other activity about the places where we live and the places that we visit.<sup>11</sup>

Maggie O'Neill et al. have taken these ideas further and argue for walking as a critical pedagogy, influenced by the work of Paulo Freire. Following Freire, they propose walking as a tool for engaging students collaboratively and co-operatively in their own learning; for seeing students as active participants, and for education as a means by which to work towards a more equitable society. As they note: 'Walking as critical pedagogy pays close attention to the relational, active listening and convivial approaches to learning in action; how walking enables us to learn creatively and critically, on the move in city and urban spaces, through time and in place.'<sup>12</sup> Thus, a local walking tour was the ideal means by which to engage our students in a way which encouraged them to take ownership of the streets and of their learning as future housing and public health professionals.

Ideas about the benefits of walking fed into our ideas about the development of students' historical awareness. Amber L. Cushing and Benjamin R. Cowan have joined Anne-Cecilie Haugstvedt and John Krogstie to argue that a mobile walking tour must include elements of geolocation and augmented reality to present historical images at modern locations.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Anthony Cocciolo and Debbie Rabina describe a project in which they used augmented reality and web-based delivery of historical material to enable learners to develop an enhanced connection with a historical topic and a heightened sense of place.<sup>14</sup> While Cocciolo and Rabina are concerned with developing historical understanding, presumably for history students, their ideas were also valid for the students with whom we were working because their research led them to develop GeoStoryteller, an app that allows users to tell stories about places.<sup>15</sup> We lacked the time and resources to develop an app of our own for the walking tour, though we were interested in seeing what had been possible elsewhere, including Niki Vermeulen's walking tours of Edinburgh for undergraduates.<sup>16</sup> In subsequent iterations of our walking tour, we used a public website, Geotourist, which enables users to develop and share walking tours that include text, images and audio.<sup>17</sup>

### Historical awareness

We ran the walking tour twice, first with undergraduate students and then with postgraduates from environmental health and housing programmes, involving around eighty students in total. It is important to note that these students were not studying history, nor did they initially have a strong sense of the ways in which history might be relevant to their interests. But students on housing courses need to learn how

<sup>11</sup> Alan Bairner, 'Urban walking and the pedagogies of the street', *Sport, Education and Society*, 16/3 (2011), pp. 371–84, at 382.

<sup>12</sup> Maggie O'Neill, Danielle O'Donovan, John Barimo, Gerard Mullally, Amin Sharifi Isaloo, Kieran Keohane, Tom Spalding, Katharina Swirak, Tom Boland and Ray Griffin, 'Introduction: Walking as critical pedagogy – Principles and practice', in Maggie O'Neill et al. (eds), *Walking as Critical Pedagogy* (London, 2026), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Amber L. Cushing and Benjamin R. Cowan, 'Walk1916: Exploring non-research user access to and use of digital surrogates via a mobile walking tour app', *Journal of Documentation*, 73/5 (2017), pp. 917–33; Anne-Cecilie Haugstvedt and John Krogstie, 'Mobile augmented reality for cultural heritage: A technology acceptance study', *2012 IEEE International Symposium on Mixed and Augmented Reality (ISMAR)* (2012), pp. 247–55.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Cocciolo and Debbie Rabina, 'Does place affect user engagement and understanding? Mobile learner perceptions on the streets of New York', *Journal of Documentation*, 69/1 (2013), pp. 98–120.

<sup>15</sup> GeoStoryteller Wiki, <<https://sourceforge.net/p/geostoryteller/wiki/Home/>> [accessed 3 January 2025].

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Curious Edinburgh, <<https://curiousedinburgh.org/>> [accessed 3 January 2025].

<sup>17</sup> Geotourist, <[www.geotourist.com](http://www.geotourist.com)> [accessed 3 January 2026]. Geotourist is a public website that hosts walking tours featuring text, images and audio and is available to everyone.

to 'age' housing since this shapes their expectations of the deficiencies they are likely to encounter in professional practice and informs the interventions they will recommend. Environmental health students also need to know about the history of housing for similar reasons, and some of this had already been taught in the classroom.<sup>18</sup> Our aim with the walk was to encourage them to gain an awareness of the past in order to think about issues surrounding housing and health in the present, and to see how concepts they were learning in the classroom were observable in the outside world. By necessity, the walk focused on an area within a small radius of the campus, and in devising it we therefore drew on resources such as Melanie Backe-Hansen's *House Histories* and local history publications in addition to the standard texts.<sup>19</sup>

### The walking tour: Methods adopted

As noted above, we were initially attracted by the idea that our students might engage particularly well with the history of housing through the use of modern technology, so we originally planned to make this an audio tour. In the event, this was not ready in time, so we used a hard copy print-out which we gave to undergraduate students. On reflection, this low-tech approach was an advantage, since it removed a potential barrier to participation: nobody was required to use their phone or their data whilst we were still trialling the technology. The self-guided walking route was made up of ten 'stops', each with a different focus. Overall, the route was designed to take in different types of housing and to be achievable in about an hour. Each stopping point was carefully linked to course content and learning outcomes and was accompanied by learning activities such as questions, suggestions for reading to be carried out later and reminders to take photographs. We also encouraged students to use their senses: to observe the noise of traffic, or the narrowness of certain streets, since the way a housing environment *feels* cannot be taught in the classroom.

This was not a tutor-led tour but one in which students followed the route without a leader. We sent students off in groups of four or five and asked them to allocate roles to themselves (navigator/photographer/those responsible for asking good questions). We hoped that working together would enable students to pool existing knowledge and to identify what they did not know. We emphasized that this was an exercise in looking and finding out and that there would be a value in asking questions which could either be answered by other members of the group or be the basis of further research. Here, we were exploring the idea of walking as critical pedagogy, that 'pays close attention to the relational, active listening and convivial approaches to learning in action'.<sup>20</sup> Asking students to walk without a tutor thus placed the onus on them to take responsibility for their own learning: to observe, ask questions, and find out what they did not know.

The printed instructions gave navigational directions, provided images and asked students to look closely at specific things such as details of buildings, while explaining the reason for the questions. The route guided students around the area adjacent to the campus, taking in various kinds of buildings and housing types, including alms-houses first built in 1729, Victorian villas now converted into houses in multiple

<sup>18</sup> Jill Stewart and Zena Lynch, *Environmental Health and Housing: Issues for Public Health* (2nd edn; London, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Melanie Backe-Hansen, *House Histories: The Secrets Behind Your Front Door* (London, 2019); Stewart Gillies and Pamela Taylor, *Hendon: Child's Hill, Golder's Green and Mill Hill* (Chichester, 1993); Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven, CT, 1982); Jill Stewart and Camilla Bourn, 'The environmental health practitioner: New evidence-based roles in housing, public health and well-being', *Perspectives in Public Health*, 133/6 (2013), pp. 325–9.

<sup>20</sup> O'Neill et al., 'Introduction', p. 3.

occupation (HMO), 1930s semis, and modern purpose-built flats.<sup>21</sup> At one stop, we showed students an image of a commercial building that was no longer there, having been demolished very recently. We asked them to look at new high-density flats that had replaced the shop and think about their implications for public and environmental health. We wanted them to understand the concept of change in the local historical environment. For example, one building, Church Farmhouse, had been surrounded by fields when it was first built, but since then the growth of suburban outer London had removed all trace of its rural past. The instructions encouraged students to look beyond the obvious and to find examples of housing in unexpected places, such as new accommodation squeezed into older buildings: ‘Walk a few metres into this road and look towards the mews at the end: what living accommodation can you see? Who might live here? Don’t forget to take some pictures of anything you find interesting.’

The enormous variety of housing evident was helpful in enabling us to guide students’ thinking about different potential problems associated with each, as well as the idea that some were once seen as the solution to societal ills. For example, we asked students to ‘Look ahead to the high rise flats you can see in the distance. Many flats were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s with a new vision of high rise living.’ We asked them to draw on their own experience: ‘Do you have experience of high rise living? What are the pros and cons?’ Mindful of the recent tragedy of the Grenfell Tower Fire (2017), we encouraged students to take the opportunity to do some further reading: ‘When you get back to class see if you can find any academic papers which consider the health and safety issues associated with flats that are similar flats to these.’ We were very aware of the sensitivities around the discussion of poor housing standards, as many students may have first-hand experience of these themselves, through issues such as mould or over-crowding, or even personal connections with the residents of Grenfell. As O’Neill et al. note, pedagogies of walking are closely linked to a more inclusive way of teaching, offering ‘a critique of a “deficit approach” which enables a more subject–subject approach to teaching and learning and supports all learners, regardless of ability or disability, and is inclusive of disadvantaged, under-represented and marginalised students’.<sup>22</sup> We intended that the walking tour represented an inclusive approach which de-centred expertise and allowed students to see that the knowledge they gained through personal experience, or through observation of the local environment, was both valid and connected to what they were learning in the classroom.

Throughout the tour, we hoped that students would gain a sense of the area as a place that did not simply arrive fully formed in the present, but which had evolved over time due to various factors, all of which are relevant to environmental and public health today. For example, the presence of alms-houses enabled us to encourage students to find out more about the historical background to this type of housing. We asked ‘What are alms-houses? What other examples do you know, perhaps near to where you live? What can you tell us about why they were originally built and who now lives in these? What clues can you find on the exterior of the building that might indicate the kind of people who live here?’ [Answer: grab rails next to front doors suggest these are homes for elderly or infirm people]. We also hoped that the tour would stimulate an understanding of less tangible factors, such as whether a property may be rented, and, if so, of the potential condition and management issues that may arise for those living there. In practice, these are important skills for the public and environmental health practitioners these students were training to be.

<sup>21</sup> Historic England, ‘Daniel Almshouses, 1–10 Church Road, NW4’, <<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1188528>> [accessed 3 January 2025].

<sup>22</sup> O’Neill et al., ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

Even in this brief walk, it was clear that this area does not conform to the stereotypical ideal of the spacious, leafy suburb. This is a busy and crowded place, with housing that is continually evolving to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population. On one of the stops, students were asked to consider a row of large Victorian villas. We asked them to use an online resource (available to students only during their studies) to estimate when the houses were built and to identify features associated with that historical period. We asked them to think about why and how they were converted into separate flats, the effects on the local environment, possible deficiencies and how these might affect health and safety. Victorian villas were, of course, always home to more than one household, in the sense of family and servants, but this did not necessitate the physical division of houses into separate dwellings using partition walls, fire doors and so on, as is required in current HMOs.<sup>23</sup> Understanding that people now frequently inhabit separate dwellings within buildings that were originally designed as single homes is important for students to grasp a sense of the problems that might occur as a result.

As these examples demonstrate, we hoped that the walking tour would encourage students to develop their creative thinking skills, drawing on existing knowledge and asking questions to make sense of complex situations. We believe that developing an awareness of the past helps students to grasp the idea that what they see in the urban environment today is the result of numerous decisions and policies, which therefore might be subject to change in the future. For example, one of the recurring themes of discussion after the walk was the presence or absence of parking spaces for domestic dwellings. Students were able to see the implications that car ownership and public transport options might have for health in the broadest sense. Recognizing how this situation has arisen, drawing on a broad historical understanding of the past and proposing solutions that have not been tried before using creative divergent thinking and imagination will be the kinds of skills required by future housing and environmental health professionals.

### **Initial student responses**

For the pilot, we invited students to provide immediate informal feedback via a quick anonymous survey at the end of the session. The generally positive comments confirmed what we had suspected about the benefits of active learning in the open air. Students reflected that they had not previously thought about what they could learn by walking around and looking at the local environment, or how questions about the past were relevant to them as future public and environmental health practitioners. We saw this as a positive outcome, as it expanded the notion of learning and enquiry beyond the four walls of the classroom. The benefits of the session were found to extend throughout the whole term, and in subsequent teaching sessions, we were able to refer back to some of the 'real life examples' students had seen on their walk. Students became more aware of the location of the university as a real place, with a history and identity of its own. They started to see that it could be of interest to them and relevant to their learning, rather than just somewhere they passed through to get to the campus. Feedback suggested that students planned to do further research on things they had seen, suggesting that they had taken control of their own learning.

Following formal ethical clearance,<sup>24</sup> we published an online version of the walk using Geotourist but with the same structure and content as the paper

<sup>23</sup> John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815–1985* (London, 1991), p. 196.

<sup>24</sup> Ethical approval from Middlesex University, reference no. 24430, December 2022.

version.<sup>25</sup> We invited postgraduate students to follow this tour in place of a classroom session and sought more formal responses from them through the completion of a short online survey.

### **General experience of walking to learn about housing history**

As noted, the undergraduates who took the tour at the beginning of term used a hard copy map. By the time the postgraduates took the online version of the tour nearer the end of term, they were in a different place with their house history learning. We gathered student feedback via a brief, anonymous, online survey and achieved a better than average response rate, reflecting the students' understanding that we were collectively trialling something new. Students were generally very positive about the walking tour as a new way of learning, saying for example, 'Yes, moving on foot gives you a much better perspective', and 'It was good to get off the campus and get familiar with the area as usually I am unable to spend any time around here after lessons'. Some enjoyed the simple difference of not being in the classroom and others suggested that it was a way to learn more widely. For example, we were told: '[It] was useful to have some insight into the history. Questions were thought-provoking.'

There was no doubt that the process brought students to the centre of their learning and that some were very inspired by the walking tour. They told us they had learnt things that would be very hard to replicate in the classroom, for example that: 'The area has more to offer than I first perceived.' It also engaged different senses that students will need as public and environmental health practitioners, thereby replicating practice and the 'real world' as closely as possible. Some students were unhappy about the weather: '[It] would have been enjoyable if the weather was more friendly: too cold', although this will also be an important aspect of their professional lives. Students thought widely about what they saw and how they could apply this knowledge, for example, 'The design of the buildings are remarkably similar (to where I live) which suggests that these designs were copied nationally'.

Many students expressed surprise at the history of the area, commenting, for example, on the 'pre-1800 buildings (still) in use', and 'it was interesting seeing those really old buildings', adding that this would encourage them to 'look more into historic construction methods'. Teaching how to age buildings can be tricky in the classroom and this method helped students to better appreciate 'Building structures and difference in style to determine the age'. Some students were surprised at the more hidden and poor-quality housing they had not seen before: 'Kind of hidden quiet areas which came up unexpected(ly)', particularly when this was close to better housing, and this helped to develop their observational and investigative skills. One student noted that 'Behind the alms-house (visible over a side wall) showed a drastic difference to the front in terms of style and modernisation'. It was clear from the feedback that students had developed a greater understanding of the local area as a place with a long history, and of some of the factors that had shaped its appearance in the present.

More widely, students reported on general issues of public and environmental health that interested them. This was about both individual housing and density, demonstrating that the tour had successfully introduced the complexities of housing,

<sup>25</sup> 'Walking through Hendon's Housing History', Geotourist tour initially developed in June 2022, <[https://geotourist.com/tours/5189/Walking\\_through\\_Hendons\\_Housing\\_History](https://geotourist.com/tours/5189/Walking_through_Hendons_Housing_History)> [accessed 3 January 2022].

its history and area development. For example, one student noted an interest in 'Building design for both HMO and single occupancy, to understand better the thermal insulation, ventilation and sanitation issues that are presented to occupants which will have an impact upon their health', and: 'Seems very cramped, spaces lent to residential that aren't suitable'. Students witnessed wider environmental issues at first-hand and noted their change through history including: 'It's interesting to see how the development over the years has impacted upon the design of thoroughfares in the area. This will have an impact upon public health due to pollution and the lack of green space.' This degree of nuanced understanding would have been hard to teach in the classroom.

## Conclusions

We found this tour an immensely creative experience, both for us in the development of our own ongoing curiosity and learning, and for students. Devising the walk was an outcome of our shared interest in finding teaching methods that students enjoy and which do not just involve sitting in a classroom. The process was creative, albeit time consuming, requiring us to research archive resources, take quality photographs of relevant housing and think through timings and directions. We found that unexpected events, such as meeting members of the community who shared local knowledge with us, contributed to our learning and helped us model the kind of divergent and creative thinking that we hoped to encourage in students.

Students were aware that this was something of an experiment and entered into the spirit of it willingly. That they enjoyed taking the tour was apparent from their comments and questions afterwards. Their responses suggest that the experience had opened their minds to the possibility of a more open, creative and enquiring approach to their everyday surroundings, beyond the confines of the university campus. Capturing this via our survey gave us the opportunity for further consideration, reflection and enhancements. Although these students were not studying history, we saw the development of skills such as historical imagination, empathy and enquiry as highly relevant to students on environmental health and housing courses. Creative thinking includes imagination, purposeful research and exploration and the ability to connect things learnt in one situation to situations elsewhere, all of which students demonstrated here.

Since our initial work on this walk, we have been able to draw together the various threads and create new walking tours in different geographical settings. Subsequent iterations of this project, at an institution in a different part of London, have led us to reflect on the idea that we want students to see themselves as historical actors, in possession of a degree of agency over future housing policy, developed through their understanding of the past. Though we had not yet fully articulated this when running the project as discussed here, we hoped that students would gain an understanding that current housing conditions, resulting from legislation, the introduction of standards, byelaws and so on, are a consequence of decisions made by people similar to themselves and with an equal degree of agency, in the past. We now reflect that we were guided by the work of Paulo Freire, who saw education not as instrumentalized knowledge but as the pursuit of critical thinking and social responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, we hoped to shape future graduates working as housing or environmental health practitioners who would not assume that the circumstances of their practice were fixed and neutral, but subject to the possibility of change, and furthermore that they might

<sup>26</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London, 1970).

be the agents of that change. We have continued to develop this creative and student-centred approach to teaching and learning in housing and health histories, confident that it is a successful method of engaging students outside of the traditional classroom setting.