

Creative Methods for Impact

Critical Policy Review

This briefing draws upon the expertise of RMIT's Design & Creative Practice (DCP) platform Creative Art & Design (CAD) and Cultural Impact & Value (CIVN) networks to articulate the value of innovative creative methods for research impact.

Creative arts and design scholarship are in constant transition and adapting to changes in assessment and impact. Globally, frameworks and metrics have moved towards advocacy; i.e., acknowledging design and creative practice's significance across social, cultural and educational areas of impact. Impactful research can be defined in terms of five broad categories that can be found through academic, social, and economic contexts and include: "Instrumental, conceptual, capacity building, cultural change, and enduring connectivity impacts."¹

Some of these assessment transformations can be found in how we design *techniques, translation and knowledge transmission*, and these are being taken up by research councils—especially in the UK, Canada and Australia. While REF in the UK, "research creation" in Canada and Engagement & Impact in Australia are demonstrating some models moving forward, there are still some gaps—from techniques and translation to transmission. The success of DCP approaches rests in its *interdisciplinarity, methodology, and dissemination*.

Overview

The ARC Engagement & Impact Framework measures impact over specific time periods. The ranking is partly on demonstrating the social and cultural impact in the public realm—adopted policy, industry implementation, larger exhibitions, for example—and partly on how the university supported the impact research journey. This second part is important because it means universities need to think about how they measure what and how they foster the growth of a project from conception to *research translation*.



Key Points

Creative methods and techniques give insights into the unseen experiences of research participants.

Design for Social Innovation co-designs with communities to solve real world problems.

Creative practitioners identify different intentions as part of their research process:

- creative intention
- research intention
- institutional intention and
- contribution beyond the institution—the 'real world' impact.²

Here we consider the importance of evidencing actual versus imagined (or more traditional outmoded) pathways to impact, while recognising that insufficient methods for doing so has led to the "dilution" of reporting in funding body case studies. What is critical moving forward is the reality that *impact is a more discursive exercise*.

The first step with this process comes with the methods deployed in the research projects, including creative and sensory ethnographic approaches that incorporate mixed methods. We identify pathways to impact, using translation in the form of creative methods, to progress that pathway toward an intended goal. We can then evidence the outcomes and impact according to our initial research question that arose as a result of the project.

"Art in Research" is the use of artistically inspired activity to gain in-depth understanding of how people make sense of their social world and experiences. Almost any art form can be used, ranging from digital storytelling,

photography, drawing, creative writing, music, to performance.³ Creative dialogic methods (workshops, talking circles, play) offer an important opportunity for researchers to engage differently as a part of ethnographic participant observation. Creative methods such as photography, poetry and creative writing can help to uncover hidden perspectives, as well as adding and strengthening participants' voices.

In a research project aiming for social impact such as engaging older audiences at museums (see Diagram 1), including creative practice researchers can better reflect the spirit of the experience of research, encourage the participation of the target group, unearth new insights, and make space for other ways of learning and engaging.⁴

With each project impact is conceptualised as an iterative process, beginning with the research question and interdisciplinary methodologies and *techniques, translations* (between disciplines, tools and experiences) and *knowledge transmission*.⁵ Context based approaches to research are central for designing strategies that promote new forms of engagement and help develop a sense of community identity as well as map and direct how the research unfolds.

In a design context, co-design consists of integrating people from different backgrounds and levels of expertise into the creative process, which enables designers and other creative practitioners to co-create with people and not for them. Co-design workshops take



Diagram 1: Research impact and creative methods of the RMIT & ACMI Pilot Study 2 Research Project.

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Diagram 2: Creative research methods for impact.

an engaged approach and transformative process similar to co-create and co-futuring workshops (imagining and working for the future together).

Propositions

DCP researchers assert that these approaches to forward creative method's impact, values, and worth in society. This vision takes a creative view to solving and finding solutions facing the world. Innovative methods intervene on multiple intersecting challenges, including climate change, ageing populations and healthcare. The impact of these research methods has far-reaching implications.

RMIT University is recognised for its *innovative creative practice scholarship*, connections with industry, its strategic commitment to rigour, and its *visionary re-shaping of creative research methods*. At RMIT DCP CAD and CIVN network's research methods remain largely obscured by more traditional approaches to achieving impact. Our research is committed to these innovative methods which lead to achievable and significant outcomes.

¹ Pettigrew 2011, 350 cited Kelemen, Mihaela and Lindsay Hamilton. 2015. "The Role of Creative Methods in Re-defining the Impact Agenda." Community Animation and Social Innovation Centre (CASIC) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, 4 and <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/what-is-impact/>.

² Adapted from Anna Thomas webinar "Evidencing Research Impact: Capturing the impact of your research beyond the academy" and Regina Hill's Impact workshop, 16 October 2019.

³ van der Vaart, G., van Hoven, B., & Huigen, P. 2018. Creative and Arts-Based Research Methods in Academic Research. Lessons from a

Participatory Research Project in The Netherlands. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 19(2), [19]. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.2.2961>.

⁴ Simons, Helen and McCormack, Brendan. 2007. "Integrating Arts-Based Inquiry in Evaluation Methodology." *Qualitative Inquiry*. 13.

⁵ Hjorth, Larissa, Kat Jungnickel, Anne Harris and Gretchen Coombs. 2019. *Creative Practice Ethnographies*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield; Jungnickel, Kat (ed). 2020. *Transmissions: Critical tactics for making and communicating research*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.