Chapter 30: Creative Dissemination

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Drawing by a child affected by parental imprisonment, which became the front cover of a poetry collection, courtesy of Lorna Brookes

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Summary

Typically, dissemination practices for student researchers consist of producing a written dissertation. For academics, dissemination most often involves publishing journal articles, book chapters, and books. However, many of our research participants, and indeed the wider public, may not be able to access, or may not have a desire to access, academic publications. It is therefore necessary to consider how to disseminate our research in culturally appropriate ways (i.e. those which are relevant to our research topics, and accessible to participants and the wider public). Whilst creative dissemination can be time-consuming and often, but not always, have additional costs involved, it is important if we are serious about sharing our findings with participants

and those who can make societal changes based on our research (such as policymakers). This chapter will introduce you to creative low-cost ways of disseminating your research and will encourage you to:

1-   Think about ways in which you could creatively disseminate your research findings

2-   Consider the different audiences your research could reach through different means of dissemination

3-   Think about how creative dissemination can work alongside your dissertation

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30.1: Introduction

Dissemination (sharing your research findings) usually, though not always, happens at the end of a research project (Keen and Todres, 2007). It involves getting research out to a wider audience, and is central to addressing the gap between what the data shows and how the research creates '**impact**'. Creatively disseminating your research might also enhance the relevance of your project to potential employers (Hill et al. 2011). Beyond your dissertation, dissemination is important for three key reasons. First, to provide research results in an accessible format to participants (due to concerns around ethics and ownership and when considering their labour in the research process). Research in human geography has suggested that sharing research findings with

participants is not only an obligation, but also a potential agent of social change (Van Blerk & Ansell, 2007). Second, there is the need to provide results in an accessible way to practitioners and policymakers who may be able to 'action' your research findings into real change for the participants. Dissemination in this way is key to moving research into practice (Cook, Cook, and Landrum, 2013). Third, the wider public might be interested in the outcomes of the research, and arguably have a right to findings where research utilises public money. Importantly, these different audiences may require different modes of dissemination and approaches should be tailored in terms of the content, message, and medium.

Most human geography final year research projects require students to produce a dissertation which presents all aspects of their research, including: aim and objectives; literature review; **methodology** and methods; findings and discussion; and a conclusion. In this chapter, we are not shunning the traditional dissertation format. Producing a dissertation is a necessary exercise and will be something you will be proud of. Yet with this chapter, we acknowledge that in the last few decades there has been a push for dissemination outside of the university in the creative arts, humanities, and social sciences (Bazeley, 2006). More recently, human geographers have begun to engage with alternative means of research dissemination, such as creative writing (Peterle, 2019); audio documentaries (Wilkinson, 2018); and theatre productions (Richardson, 2015). It is best to consider building dissemination into the design of your study, as some types of dissemination may require ethical approval. Please speak to your supervisor about this and see Hall's chapter in this volume.

This chapter first provides an overview of creative dissemination within the discipline of geography and beyond. We then provide snapshots of creative dissemination taken from research projects, considering the use of poetry, audio documentary, social media, postcards, and performance. We conclude by offering some useful resources and recommendations for undertaking creative dissemination.

30.2: Overview

Creative dissemination, be it for participants, policymakers, or the wider public, does not necessarily mean moving away from writing. You could re-work your dissertation findings into new formats which can be better disseminated, or you could consider incorporating these techniques into your dissertation, so they can later be disseminated. Different types of writing can be used to achieve different modes of dissemination (Barnard, 2015). For instance, poetry can be used as a powerful medium through which to deliver key research findings (see Eshun and Madge, 2019 – this volume). Typically, poems are used to recount participants' narratives, using verbatim excerpts from participants' interviews or diaries, for instance. Novels are another creative written means of dissemination. Lancione (2017, p. 994) uses an ethnographic novel approach as an "activist mode of existence". The non-academic text comprised of a participant's introduction, an ethnographic novel, 21 graphic illustrations and a political essay. Lancione (2017) argued that this format allowed for a meaningful re-appropriation of fieldwork (exploring experiences of homelessness in Italy) and celebrates the use of creative dissemination in pursuing engagement with vulnerable groups. The complementary use of visual, alongside written output, as adopted by Lancione (2017)

is something worth considering. Moura, Almeida and Geerts (2016) compare a documentary with a scientific paper to communicate research. They found that the documentary delivered information which the paper could not. The authors concluded, however, that both formats were valuable and complement each other.

The Internet and, in particular, social media, can be harnessed as a cost-effective means of dissemination (Wilkinson and Weitkamp 2013) with international reach. Some researchers have taken to blogging, recognising it as a quick and low-cost way to reach a global audience (Putnam, 2011), in comparison to academic texts which can involve lengthy publishing processes. Researching climate change, Newell and Dale (2015) created a blog and a Facebook page to share climate change news and innovations. Further, they published a series of YouTube videos featuring animations and interviews. The research team also held virtual conversations to share and facilitate discussion around the research outcomes. This demonstrates the breadth of possibilities for online dissemination. It is important that you have a conversation with your supervisor if you are considering online dissemination so that they can support you.

Some creative means of dissemination may rely on the researcher or participants possessing a skill or access to funding to employ someone with a particular skillset (e.g. comic strips, see Priego, 2016; Vigurs, Jones and Harris, 2016; animations, see Rose and Flynn, 2018; Vaughn et al. 2013; filmmaking, see Rakić and Chambers, 2010; or art, see Lapum et al. 2012). If you have a particular skillset (for instance performance, dance, or art), you might consider how this could be harnessed as a means of dissemination. Certain authors have reflected on the process of transforming the analysis of their data

into performed words and choreographed movement (e.g. Bagley and Cancienne, 2001; Gray, 2003). Harte (2017) discusses the making of *My English Tongue, My Irish Heart*, a drama about the Irish in Britain. The play toured cultural and community centres in the UK and Ireland in May 2015, and was the product of a collaboration between an academic researcher, a professional playwright/director, and a not-for-profit theatre company. Harte (2017, p. 75) reflects on the process of "navigating the transformation from page to stage", recounting the difficulty in striking a balance between the artistic and aesthetic demands of the theatre and the ethical imperative to honour the integrity of the research underpinning the play. This idea of "dramatising data" is something which Saldana (2003, p. 218) also contemplates. Arguably, some arts could be so interpretative that it loses meaning or obscures the message of the dissemination (Lapum et al. 2014). Whatever means of dissemination you choose, you have a responsibility to try to **represent** participants and the knowledge they imparted to you accurately and respectfully[1].

30.3: Creative dissemination snapshots

In this section, researchers provide examples of creative dissemination from their own research. Within each of the snapshots, the authors emphasise why this means of dissemination was relevant to their project, and bring to the fore opportunities and challenges of the mode of dissemination. It is worth noting that some of these snapshots are based on research projects engaging with **vulnerable** participants and it would be unlikely that student researchers would be granted ethical approval for research with

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[1] See Wilkinson and Wilkinson's (2017) discussion of how representation and responsibility are central to writing up research findings.

these particular groups (i.e. children of prisoners, or children with complex health care needs). Nonetheless, these snapshots usefully communicate the importance of considering the **vulnerability** of participants when deciding on means of dissemination.

Snapshot 1: Poetry as dissemination for research with children impacted by parental imprisonment

Lorna Brookes

"Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine." (Oliver, 1993. p. 110)

Children of prisoners are one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. They suffer multiple challenges including separation anxiety, poverty, misplaced guilt, shame, stigma and bullying. The My Time Project (www.themytimeproject.com/) is a community-based organisation that helps children of prisoners through peer support groups. They provide an opportunity for children to meet others who share their experience and are a forum where they explore coping strategies with a trained facilitator. Poetry was chosen as one means of dissemination for this group as it is considered a medium for self-expression[2].

However, for many participants, including children in this project, poetry may be unfamiliar. When working with those who may not feel confident to produce poetry, the most important resources are kindness, patience, and the resolve to assure them that whatever they write is right. As talking through feelings and challenges is central to the

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[2] See Esson and Madge (this volume) for some great ideas to support using poetry as research method.

support group, this provides a natural prelude to creative writing, because it boosts the children's confidence that what they have to say matters. Poems often emerge in the midst of strong emotions. It is therefore recommended that participants are able to access any relevant support during or following the writing session. Furthermore, participants should have the option not to write at all, and be offered an alternative activity.

The output for this project was a published poetry collection called *Seen and Heard (*see Baldwin and Raikes, 2019). This gave voice to children who are typically unheard, who felt enormous pride in becoming published authors. In contrast to more traditional means of dissemination, this approach enables participants to take credit for their own work as authors, rather than being absorbed in a text in which the researcher takes centre stage. It is important to remember that parental **consent** and child **assent** must be obtained to publish any poems. Also, some participants may prefer to use a **pseudonym** and the option of choosing between one or their 'real' name should be offered.

Ultimately, there is much to gain from using poetry as a means of dissemination. A finished collection may mean that participants read the works of others they might never meet, and so the benefits of peer support could be extended beyond the immediate individual or group.

Snapshot 2: Making radio documentary with young people: Stories of the Liverpool riots

Matthew C. Benwell, Bethan Evans, and Andy Davies

This research project involved the co-production of a radio documentary about the 1981 and 2011 Liverpool riots between academics and a group of young volunteers at KCC Live (a community radio station based in Knowsley Community College, near Liverpool, UK). The young volunteers made decisions about who they wanted to interview to learn more about the 1981 riots; these included people who were caught up in the riots, youth leaders, journalists, and members of the police force. The young people engaged with archival footage of the riots before undertaking the interviews and then analysed the data to produce the radio documentary. The young volunteers were provided with training on how to undertake interviews and qualitative data analysis, and they trained the academic researchers in using radio editing and production software. The radio documentary was considered an appropriate means of dissemination because the young people were skilled in audio production. It offered them a platform to air their perspectives on a familiar medium, radio, and enabled access to a diverse audience beyond those normally reached in academia. The documentary was broadcast several times on KCC Live, made available on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoobCjbjnLY) and played at a launch event in Liverpool. These means of dissemination intended to reach members of the local community, young listeners to the community radio station, as well as national and international audiences online.

A key challenge of this co-produced mode of dissemination was retention of the young volunteers. The time commitment was across a number of months (across academic years) and was therefore difficult for the young people, particularly those who were studying and/or in the process of moving to university/embarking on their future careers, to commit to for the full time period. For these reasons there were a number of dropouts. The young people were rewarded for the time they invested with gift vouchers. Whilst it is important to consider the demands placed on participants as a result of participation in research projects, the cost implications of offering rewards are not always viable for the student researcher. There is also an ongoing ethical debate about the appropriateness of remunerating research participants. You might like to speak to your supervisor about some of these challenges. Students considering the co-production of podcasts or radio documentaries to disseminate research should consider free and accessible software such as Audacity if they do not have access to costly editing studios and software.

Snapshot 3: Using social media to disseminate the Humans of the Royal Welsh Show

Greg Thomas

This research project emerged as part of doctoral research investigating the impact of agricultural shows on rural society. The Royal Welsh Agricultural Show is the largest event of its kind in Europe, attracting around 250,000 people to a purpose-built showground in Builth Wells, Powys, mid Wales, UK. Given the variety and volume of people that the show attracts, the research generated significant interest. Thus, it was

important to ensure that the research was disseminated to as wide of an audience as possible in a timely manner. I considered social media the solution to this, specifically Facebook and Twitter, as they are highly accessible, allow for user engagement, including sharing internationally, and are used by many of the attendees of the show.

Inspired by Stanton's (2013) blog and book *Humans of New York*[3], the *Humans of the Royal Welsh Show* project was born. *Humans of the Royal Welsh Show* told the stories of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the stories of the people who exhibit, compete, visit, and volunteer at the Royal Welsh Show. I took photos of people at the show and asked them to provide a short statement on their experience of the event. The photographs and statements were posted live throughout the event onto the social media pages I created: *Humans of the Royal Welsh Show* (Facebook) and Twitter *@HumansOfTheRWS* (Twitter), thereby taking a form of in situ dissemination. People commented, liked, and shared the posts during the event.

These pages are still live, serving a legacy of the project a number of years after it ended. The Facebook page has, at the time of writing, 2,254 likes from 32 different countries, whilst the Twitter page has 303 followers. Posts from the pages reached 652,014 Facebook users and 287,406 Twitter users. Through this mode of dissemination, a far greater audience was reached than through publishing this research in academic books or journals. It is important to add a brief note on ethics here; due to the very public nature of the dissemination, whereby photos of the attendees were posted online, I

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[3] Humans of New York is a photoblog and 'best seller' book of street portraits and interviews collected on the streets of New York City. Since 2010 the blog has gained over 17 million Facebook followers.

decided not to offer participants anonymity. All participants gave recorded verbal consent to their images and photos being posted online.

Snapshot 4: Using postcards to support dissemination and improve practice

Bernie Carter

The aim of the qualitative study 'assessing and managing pain in children who have complex needs' was to explore the experiences of parents and health professionals in relation to the assessment and management of pain in children who have profound cognitive impairment. In healthcare it is particularly important that dissemination goes beyond people simply learning new things. Effective dissemination should trigger a level of critical thinking about what has been learned, and how this learning, for example, could be incorporated into a professional's practice or the way in which a parent cares for their child. One simple way of achieving this is by adding a postcard element to a presentation, workshop or teaching session, to provoke discussion and elicit concise responses.

Postcards were designed using an image of a twisted torso, which was suggestive of tension and pain and was neutral in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. The reverse had space for the person's postal and/or email address and space for the person to write or draw their response and learning. When presenting the findings of the research to the public, towards the end of the presentation I invite attendees to write down/draw an image of something memorable they learned from the session onto the postcard. I guide health professionals to think of something they would like to implement in their

practice, and we suggest parents note something that they learned that could help their child. We invite attendees to hand the completed postcards back to us. I explain that I will return the postcards to them in about three months as a reminder of what they learned. The value of the postcards is that they trigger personal reflection on the day, while three months later they act as a form of continuing embedded dissemination.

When returning the postcards by post, I usually put them in an envelope so that only the person opening the envelope sees the message; this is particularly important if people have shared sensitive learning. An alternative option is to scan the postcard and send it by email; this is the cheapest option and possibly the most secure as it goes directly to the person. The downside of scanning the postcard is that the person does not receive the physical postcard that they can keep as a reminder. It is also worth considering that some people (for instance children or elderly participants) may not have access to a computer or the internet.

Snapshot 5: Dissemination by performance

Sergio A. Silverio

"On stage, I am in the dark." (Maria Callas, 1923-1977)

In mid-April 2019, I received an e-mail from theatre makers Natasha Nixon and Marcelo Dos Santos (known collectively as EUROTRASH) explaining that they were working on a project called 'Trigger Warning' which would be performed at the Camden People's Theatre. The piece was to contest the ideas of 'safe spaces' and 'trigger warnings' to get

people thinking about psychological and physiological effects of stress and trauma. They were contacting me as I had previously presented on burn-out and stress. I agreed to meet Natasha and Marcelo and was interviewed about the fundamentals of stress and trauma. One aspect they were interested in was the fight or flight stress response, which I explained can involve involuntary voiding of one's bowels, dilating of the pupils, body hair standing on end, etc. The pair invited me to a preview after a few weeks.

The preview was intriguing – one male actor went through a series of incredibly physical performances, snapshots of a tortured soul writhing with discomfort as a voice-over narrated his pain tauntingly. And then, there it was in the performance – the exact words I had so nonchalantly thrown into the conversation about the fight or flight response, and rather humorously: "You may shit yourself". The small, selected audience erupted into laughter, as the actor further descended into distorted positions as he floated into some euphoric mental anguish, and before long the house lights were back up and applause filled the theatre. I left the theatre excited for the final play.

The opening night performance commenced with an actor and actress both donning bright yellow polyester air hostess costumes cleaning the stage with an old fashioned hoover. The music was akin to the start of a horror film, and the actress maintained a creepy smile throughout, whilst her dishevelled male co-star appeared to be in agonising distress, visibly sweating, with eyes rolling, and weak at the stockinged knee. The portrayal of stress and trauma was exaggerated and caricatured, but laced with truth; making the performance uncomfortably close to reality.

The play reached a different audience than the academic arena in which my work is usually read or presented. Anyone considering utilising performance to disseminate research should make use of any performance skills they possess (indeed, one actor/actress alone with minimalist staging and props can be powerful). Further, you can consider partnering with performing arts departments in your university or local colleges.

Reflecting on creative dissemination

The above snapshots showcase modes of dissemination used by researchers and/or their participants. The researchers who worked with participants to **co-produce** outputs required participants to either possess a particular skill (as in the case of the audio documentary) or to train or nurture participants to develop particular skills (such as the creation of poetry). As Lorna alluded to in her snapshot about poetry, it is important to remember that participants may feel worried or concerned if they are participating in a dissemination activity which requires a certain skill or level of confidence (also consider the examples of art or drama), and the researcher must reassure to make them feel comfortable, and indeed be prepared to offer them an alternative activity if participants would prefer this.

Once you have decided on your means of dissemination, it is necessary to consider where to share you research. For instance, the audio documentary discussed above could be shared in numerous ways: on the radio station; YouTube; SoundCloud and social media. As such, you should consider dissemination as a wider activity than the artefact or 'thing' you create. Lorna worked with participants to produce the poetry

collection *Seen and Heard* but without knowing about this book, the book alone as a means of dissemination would not reach wide audiences. As such, Lorna has promoted this book via social media and has even appeared on television to do so. If you are disseminating via social media, like Greg in the *Humans of the Royal Welsh Show* project, there are ways that you can maximise the reach of your posts, for instance by replying to comments, sharing posts, and tagging different people or organisations if appropriate[4]. Greg notes that the Facebook and Twitter accounts he set up are still active a number of years after the project has ended. Whilst this can be seen as a positive, as Greg states, serving as a 'legacy' for the project, it is important too to consider the permanence of information posted online, particularly considering information can be screen shot or re-tweeted in an instant.

The mode of dissemination used by Bernie moved beyond a typical presentation used to disseminate research findings by using the novelty of a postcard so that participants could document their own key 'take home' message from the research. Having the postcard posted to people three months after they attended the talk serves as a prompt or reminder of the research findings. This prompt may be particularly important if your research is being disseminated to those who can alter or change their behaviour based on research findings, or practitioners who can embed new knowledge into their own practice. Meanwhile, Sergio's account of contributing to a research project which used performance as a means of dissemination, highlights the importance of staying true to the participants' words and stories. Whilst Sergio acknowledges the dramatised nature

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[4] SAGE has a useful blog post about maximising the impact of your research using Twitter https://connection.sagepub.com/blog/sage-connection/2012/06/27/maximizing-the-impact-of-your-academic-research-using-twitter/

of the performance, the closeness to reality is what made the play powerful for him. Sergio also acknowledges the delight of hearing his own words spoken in the play, meaning that whilst the broader narrative may be paraphrased, including verbatim excerpts from participants can be meaningful.

The above snapshots are diverse in terms of their intended audience, message, and medium, and we hope they give you ideas about disseminating findings from your own project.

30.4: Suggested readings

Bazeley, P. (2006). Research dissemination in creative arts, humanities and the social sciences. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *25*(3), 307-321.

Using an ethnographic case study approach, the author explores the ways in which research findings can be made visible to others, both within and outside the university, with a focus on creative arts, humanities and social sciences. Students will find the discussion of target audiences and modes of dissemination particularly useful.

Hill, J., Kneale, P., Nicholson, D., Waddington, S., & Ray, W. (2011). Re-framing the geography dissertation: A consideration of alternative, innovative and creative approaches. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *35*(3), 331-349.

This paper reviews the opportunities and challenges of re-framing traditional final year geography dissertations. The paper argues that re-imagining dissertations can enhance their relevance to employers. Students will find this

paper useful if you are interested in aligning your academic interests and future career demands.

Keen, S. and Todres, L. (2007). Strategies for disseminating qualitative research findings: Three exemplars. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 8. (3). pp. 1-12

This article considers dissemination that goes beyond publication or conference presentations. The article will give you insight into the importance of tailoring the dissemination approach to the desired audience. The authors also consider ethical issues that may be involved in creative forms of dissemination.

30.5: Summary

Throughout this chapter, we have discussed ways in which you can creatively disseminate your research, beyond your dissertation. The snapshots provided go beyond the forms of dissemination which traditionally serve academic communities (such as books and journal articles) and attempt to communicate findings in a meaningful way to participants, policymakers, and the wider public. It is important to be mindful that not all research topics may be suited to particular modes of dissemination. However, we argue that creative dissemination can be useful for accessing different audiences and ensuring impact beyond the academy. Ultimately, following Priego (2016), creative dissemination can lead to wider public engagement with research and improve the possibilities for research to influence public policy.

We offer the following recommendations for those considering disseminating their research in creative ways:

1. **Discuss any ideas for creative dissemination with your dissertation supervisor**

2. **Consider culturally credible ways to disseminate your research, ensuring relevance to your topic, participants, and the wider public**

3. **Build in time for creative dissemination**

We hope that, taking these recommendations on board, you can begin to consider exciting ways in which you can disseminate your research findings.

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