

Proposed Working Title: Creative Research Methods

Proposed Sub-Title: For The Study Of Society

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Synopsis and Aims

Research and researchers are inherently creative: every research project, and every research method, is devised and created by researchers. Historically, the dominance of the positivist model led to the creative aspects of research being sidelined in favour of ‘objectivity’ and ‘facts’. Nowadays there is increasing recognition of creativity in the research process, particularly in social research.

However, there is no book covering creative ways to approach and conduct social research. A new journal, Creative Approaches to Research, has published six issues. There are books and articles covering particular facets of the subject, such as performative research methods and visual research methods, which would provide useful background material and references.

I want to explore the nature of creativity, the nature of research, the intersection between the two, and the potential within that for growth. The book will be particularly relevant to postgraduate students of social research methods, whether as a core subject or in support of a dissertation or thesis. It will also be relevant to some academic researchers, independent researchers and practitioner-researchers. The aim will be to write a practical book for an academic audience. The book will include examples of creative methods in practice, advice about when to use creative and when to use more traditional methods, and exploration of how creative methods can be used to help us understand the research process, its underlying concepts, and wider issues in society.

The Most Important Aspects Of This Book

- It fills a big gap in the existing literature – to the best of my knowledge, there is no such book currently available.
- It will span the gulf between academia and practice by being well referenced, soundly underpinned by theory, and also a ‘how to’ book.
- It will be written in plain English.
- It will contain a logical flow of information, clearly structured by chapters, headings, cross-references and summaries.

Background Information

This is a big gap in the market. A search of Google Scholar, on 27.7.12, using the search term “creative research methods” for any date and excluding patents and citations, yielded fewer than 200 results. The same search on 4.1.13 yielded just over 200 results, 40 of which were dated 2012 – so the field is growing.

There are a number of books and papers on particular types of creative research methods, such as visual methods for collecting data and various methods of analysing that data such as metaphor analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis. Much of the background research will be done through journal articles. This is my initial list of journals to search:

1. Creative Approaches to Research
2. The Qualitative Report
3. Qualitative Social Research Forum
4. International Journal of Qualitative Methods
5. International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being
6. Qualitative Health Research
7. Qualitative Inquiry
8. Qualitative Research
9. Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management
10. Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise
11. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health
12. Qualitative Research Journal
13. Qualitative Social Work
14. Qualitative Sociology
15. Qualitative Sociology Review
16. Journal of Applied Quantitative Methods
17. Journal of Quantitative Criminology
18. Journal of Quantitative Linguistics
19. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis in Social Sciences
20. Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods
21. Journal of Mixed Methods Research
22. Methodology
23. Research Synthesis Methods

Background research will also be done online, as many creative methods are first disseminated through social media. Twitter provides a rich flow of information with links to blog posts and other web pages. Other background research will take place through real-life conversations, both one-to-one and – where my very limited budget allows – at seminars and conferences such as the art/science research forum hosted at CRASSH in Cambridge.

Books will be sourced through Birmingham University Library, to which I have access until at least August 2013, or through the British Library. As a last resort I will buy them, although not until I have secured a publishing advance and/or some grant funding. In the last few months I have read every book I could find on the subject of creativity. My future reading list currently includes *Popularizing Research* (ed. Vannini, 2012), *Playing with Purpose: Adventures in Performative Social Science* (Gergen & Gergen, 2012) (and probably some other books from the 'Writing Lives' series), *Visual Storytelling* (ed Klanten, Ehmann and Schulze 2011), *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People* (ed. Thomson 2008), *Radical Research* (Schostak & Schostak, 2007), and *Witnesses, Engineers and Storytellers* (Marris 1997). Other suggestions would be most welcome.

Provisional Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

- Rationale for the book: why it's important
- What is 'creativity'?
- How does this apply to research?
- Overview of contents: what the book includes

Chapter 2 – When To Use Creative Research Methods

- The need to understand conventional approaches for designing most research – and why
- The role of more creative design approaches: mixed methods, action research, participatory appraisal, bricolage, etc
- How to design a research project
- The importance of moving from research question to research method, not vice versa

Chapter 3 – Creative Research Methods and Ethics

- How can we know what we know?
- Managing ethics with untried methods
- The ethics of conducting research online

Chapter 4 – Creative Thinking, Creative Reading

- How to think creatively
- Using literature creatively
- Using theory creatively
- Drawing on work from other disciplines

Chapter 5 – Data Collection

- Two-dimensional visual data: drawing, painting, photography
- Three-dimensional visual data: collage, clay, quilting
- Audio
- Video
- Storytelling, poetry
- Other techniques: Talking Mats, outcome stars, Mosaic technique etc
- Collecting data online
- Secondary data

Chapter 6 – Data Analysis

- How can analysis be creative?
- Looking differently: metaphor analysis, discourse analysis, phenomenological analysis, etc

- Collaborative analysis
- Involving participants in analysis

Chapter 7 – Writing For Research

- Creativity in research writing
- What's been done
- What can be done
- Using fiction writing and poetic techniques in research writing

Chapter 8 – Presenting Findings

- Exhibitions
- Drama
- Music
- Storytelling

Chapter 9 – Dissemination

- Social media
- Popular media
- Guerrilla dissemination

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

- Limitations of creative research methods

Glossary

Resources (books, websites, associations etc)

Pedagogical Features

Again, these may change as the book is written, but at present I'm thinking of: boxed examples of how methods have been and/or could be used in practice; links to relevant literature and other resources; pointers to ways of finding the latest developments, e.g. through social media (the LinkedIn group called Frontiers In Quant Research is an example). I'm open to other suggestions.

Author Information

I am a British woman who has worked as an independent researcher since 1998, and as Director of We Research It Ltd since 2001. The research contracts I have undertaken can be viewed at <http://www.weresearchit.co.uk/projects.php>. I have taught on evaluation and research for public and third sector organisations and universities in England and Syria. I am a member of the Social Research Association, the UK Evaluation Society, and the Social Return on Investment Network. I am also an Associate Research Fellow with the Third Sector Research Centre

(Birmingham University). As an independent researcher, I have no salaried time in which to write this book, nor any budget for expenses incurred in its authorship. However, if this proposal is accepted, I intend to apply for a publishing advance and some grant funding to support the writing process.

I have recently written *Research and Evaluation for Busy Practitioners* which was published by The Policy Press in October 2012 and has been well reviewed. I was lead author of *Commissioning Consultancy* (Kara and Muir, Russell House Publishing, 2003) and have written articles for *Community Care*, *Housing Today* and the *British Journal of Occupational Learning*. I have a paper coming out in *Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management* in May 2013, have submitted a paper to the *Journal of Public Mental Health*, and am preparing to submit a paper to the *International Journal of Public Management (IJPM)*. All of these are on aspects of research methods, and the IJPM paper is co-authored with Dr Malin Arvidson of TSRC. I have also researched and written documents for clients such as Kindle (formerly the Community Sector Partnership for Children and Young People), the Charity Commission, and the National Association of Volunteer Bureaux (now Volunteering England).

I have a cross-disciplinary PhD in partnership working, with an emphasis on research methods, from the Open University (2006); an MSc in social research methods from Staffordshire University (2001); and a BSc in social psychology from the London School of Economics. My PhD thesis can be downloaded at <http://www.wereseearchit.co.uk/writing.php>.

Target Audience

Primary audience: students and teachers of social research methods, whether as a core subject or in support of a dissertation or thesis.

Secondary audience: academic researchers, independent researchers and practitioner-researchers.

The Social Research Association and the UK Evaluation Society are both likely to be interested in this book.

There is an international market, in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in particular, also Europe and South America.

Course Information

This book is intended for teachers and students of social research methods, whether as a core subject or in support of a dissertation or thesis. There are hundreds of courses in the UK alone that include modules on social research methods.

Competition

There is nothing at all, that I can find, which addresses this subject directly.

Typescript Information

The total word count is estimated to be about 80,000. There may be some photographs and possibly some maps. Tables and diagrams can be supplied in Word format. Work has begun on the typescript. A paper about the potential for fiction writing to contribute to academic writing is scheduled for publication in the journal *Qualitative Research in Organisation and Management* in May, and this would form the basis for part of Chapter 6. I do not expect to need any copyright clearance.

Timetable

I would like nine months to write this book from the date of its contract. Working backwards, if we're aiming for publication in mid-2014, you'll need delivery by late 2013, which means the first draft typescript will need to go to referees by autumn 2013. The publication date is not time-critical, although it would be good to publish the book before the end of the academic year 2013-14, so it can get on to book lists for the following academic year.

Acknowledgements

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