

Capturing creative research in the academy

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Introduction

Beyond Thesis and Exegesis: capturing creative practice to improve supervision of creative arts higher degree candidates was a research project commenced in 2014 (Adams, Newman, Kueh, & Ferguson, 2015).

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with Higher Degree by Research (HDR) supervisors and candidates to better inform what the experience/s of capturing creative research actually is and how we might benefit from thinking differently, thinking broadly, about the practice and process of developing new knowledge in the creative arts.

Capture in this paper does not only refer to the various technologies needed to document the process of research, as a data collection tool, but also as a necessary reflexive apparatus to deepen the research. In addition, this capturing offers valuable dissemination platforms during and after the research.

Background information

The diversity of candidates undertaking post-graduate level studies in creative arts has prompted recognition that there are a variety of ways in which a candidate might submit their doctoral work (Paltridge, Starfield, Ravelli, & Nicholson, 2011; Phillips, Stock, Vincs, & Mustard, 2009). As such, one of the biggest challenges for supervisors of creative arts HDR candidates is providing them with guidance on how to document the tacit knowledge that informs and underpins their creative process.

literature review

Multi-modal strategies present possible ways for practice-led researchers to synthesise and clarify experiential and embodied creative processes (Naugle & Crawford, 2012).

Nicola Wood (2010, p. 3) notes that while video can “accurately capture very rich material” there is always the “danger that the act of observation will change the situation being observed” while the complex skills required in artistic practice are largely tacit and that “video has a tendency to conceal rather than reveal the practice”. She does conclude that video “offers much potential for conveying rich contextual information about the research undertaken and can form an important part of an online multimedia document that can make research outputs widely accessible” (p. 9).

Research plan and methods

Stage 1: literature review

Stage 2: interviews

Stage 3: focus groups

Stage 4: data analysis

Research plan and methods

Stage 1: literature review: explored corresponding programs nationally and internationally to establish comparative contemporary contexts for creative arts research processes.

Two major findings

1. there was consensus that documentation was required only for recording purposes, that is; it feeds into the exegesis for examination.
2. there was little discussion of how capturing the process might assist in extending the coverage or impact of research

Research plan and methods

Stage 2: interviews

Open-ended semi-structured interviews with 10 supervisors of creative arts HDR candidates were

- Visual Arts (Paul Uhlman and Lyndall Adams)
- Performing Arts (Renée Newman and Maggi Phillips)
- Design (Stuart Medley and Christopher Kueh)
- Creative Writing (Marcella Polain and John Ryan)
- Music (Cat Hope)
- Film (George Karpathakis)

Research plan and methods

Stage 2: interviews

The following questions were fielded as starting points:

- How do you see your practice/creative process and what are the steps in your process?
- What are your thoughts on the capturing the developmental documentation of creative research?
- How do you encourage your HDR candidates to capture process?
- What are the ways in which capturing process could benefit the HDR candidate?
- How is the documented material currently managed/stored and how accessible is the data captured to the supervisory team?
- In what ways might this capture process be improved?
- Do you think the relationship between the captured data and reflexive thinking is important? Why?
- What are your thoughts on the practitioner-researcher making developmental or unfinished work openly accessible for educational purposes?

Research plan and methods

Stage 3: focus groups

Some of the themes that emerged from the interviews were used to inform two focus groups with approximately 15 HDR candidates and supervisors of creative research. The focus groups were conducted via the existing interdisciplinary practice-led research forum *This is not a seminar* (initiated in 2012 to address the specific needs of practice-led researchers). Questions were developed from responses to similar themes directed to the Supervisors in stage one.

Research plan and methods

Stage 4: data analysis

A delay in analysing the data occurred due to the sudden passing of a much loved colleague in WAAPA (Associate Professor Maggi Phillips PhD) who was pivotal in developing university support for creative research and for all things in creative HDR supervision. The impact of this tragedy was varied and numerous including the researchers on this project taking on more duties around HDR supervision and having to delay projects such as this one.

Findings

- Technical
- Theoretical
- Memory

Future research

- Alleviate the perceived technical problems
- Dedicated server (supervisors)
- Candidates suggestions on improvement included better and/or the latest technology (as best suited to their own discipline), but a recurring theme related to access and availability of equipment and suitable spaces.
- Some areas of interest that we have already considered as part of the next stage include
 - 1) how this capturing might function,
 - 2) what it might look like,
 - 3) how the data collected might be stored,
 - 4) who would have the right to access what is essentially raw data and
 - 5) what are the ethical issues surrounding disseminating this raw data.

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Questions