

Creative methods –drawing, writing and photography

Overview

Creative methods, incorporating drawing, writing and photography, can be used to evaluate activities and projects. These tools and techniques can be useful for capturing and visually displaying different people's opinions and experiences of a project.

In general, people enjoy being creative, which makes these methods a really valuable evaluation tool. Creative methods can be very attractive, providing a good focus for discussion. Lots of different things can be drawn or written about, for instance creative methods can be used to understand perceptions of certain issues, words, or topics (e.g. science, health or well being) or usage (i.e. where people do things, which places they visit). For instance, people could be asked to draw mental maps (these do not have to be geographically accurate) to show how people perceive spaces.

Why use it?

Creative methods can be a means of capturing more open, qualitative information than traditional qualitative methods will provide. Creative methods are visually effective, and can be used to stimulate debate or democratise information.

Instructions for use

A number of aspects or features of a project can be evaluated by using creative methods. Some examples of creative methods include:

- discussion boards or posters, giving people, e.g. participants, the opportunity to write responses to questions, words or images;
- drawing, as a response to certain words or subject matters;
- postcards, giving people, e.g. participants, the opportunity to provide feedback;
- voting systems, asking audience members to choose or vote on certain topics;
- quizzes;
- disposable cameras, given to stakeholders to capture experiences of being involved in a project.

The outputs of such methods could be the basis for further discussion.

Who to use it with

This depends on the approach adopted, but there is potential to use these techniques with everyone who comes to an activity or is involved in project.

When to use it

In general, creative methods are best used during the activity.

Limitations

- These methods are unpredictable; some will be rewarding, providing you with more information than you anticipated and perhaps, ideas for a new project. However, some might be brief and uninformative.
- You will not get the precise answers from these methods, compared to that you would expect from a questionnaire or interview.
- Creative methods yield lots of information and data, but depending upon the nature of the method this could prove difficult to analyse.

Considerations

Not applicable.

Timing

The time needed to undertake this method is difficult to assess; you will need to build in time at the beginning of the activity to brief those taking part on what to do, and time will be needed at the end to analyse the outputs of the creative methods e.g. images, texts.

Link with other methodologies

Creative methods can be used during a workshop, or provide information for a workshop or focus group.

Further Reading

If you are interested in finding out more, the reference below covers both a background and application of the method:

Kindon, S., Pain, R. and Kesby, M. (2008) *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*, Routledge: London

Example 01

The example below is taken from the evaluation report of a public engagement project called Destination London. Destination London was a series of public events structured around the experiences and perceptions of east Europeans who have written about London. The project was run by the UCL School of Slavonic & East European Studies, funded by the UCL Public Engagement Beacon Bursary Scheme. The events were intended to explore new approaches to seeing and writing about the city, whilst marking the completion of the AHRC-funded East Looks West travel writing research project. Over 100 attended the events, to fit with the theme of the project participants were asked to give feedback on postcards.

One of the aims of the project was to provide new perspectives on intercultural interaction in London through travel writing.

It was clear from audience take-up that the popular appeal of travel writing provided a hook that attracted people; the way it was approached in the events was carefully orchestrated to use this,

but also to subvert preconceptions and stereotypes.

Feedback at the writers' panel was solicited by distributing London postcards (quite kitsch: London buses and Big Ben) and asking for written comments on the event. Specific remarks included: 'Tonight really helped me understand my feelings as an immigrant in London, and as a Londoner back at home in Poland.' 'Pessoa said 'my homeland is the Portuguese language'. I think Danilo Kiš said the same thing (not about Portuguese, though!).' The question and answer session after the readings also opened out into a discussion of travel and intercultural interaction, as well as other matters such as style in travel writing. (Postcard: 'Why do travel writers all write as if we were in the 19th century in terms of style?')

Example 02

Disposal? was an interactive exhibition designed to consult with UCL staff and students and the general public, about UCL Museums & Collections about what UCL should keep and what should be 'disposed'.

The main purpose of the exhibition was to have discussion about how museums should work and for us as people who work in museums to understand how our public view the collections and the work we do. To this end, evaluation was built in to the whole format of the exhibition. A number of methods were used, including:

- A voting system, where the project asked visitors to vote on which one of 5 objects they would dispose of if they were a museum curator. Visitors voted at the beginning of their visit and again at the end, once they had had a chance to look around the exhibition. By tracking individual votes we will be able to see what criteria people used to make their decision and also whether they changed their minds.
- Discussion boards, an area was created in the exhibition with posters and post-its notes for visitors to leave comments against a number of questions which were posed to them.