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A DOI is not enough – Can practice research be captured by libraries and archives?

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2024/07/02/a-doi-is-not-enough-can-practice-research-be-captured-by-libraries-and-archives/

July 2, 2024



*The recording and indexing of research plays a vital role in how it can be found and used, but what happens when the output from a research project is not a written document, but a performance, series of events or an artistic work? **Holly Ranger, Jenny Evans and Adam Vials Moore** discuss findings from a series of projects exploring how these forms of practice research can be better documented and made more accessible to researchers and research users.*

Discussions around open standards for scholarly communication have primarily focused on documenting and disseminating text-based ‘traditional’ forms of research: a single static PDF or a quantitative dataset that retrospectively captures a research process. As a result, existing open standards and infrastructure do not adequately reflect the forms of research where outputs are more diverse in form, or where the knowledge created is embodied in the activity of research (or practice) over time, rather than in a single document.

‘Practice research’ is ‘an umbrella term that describes all manners of research where practice is the significant method of research conveyed in a research output’. The research element can be embodied in the work or in the representation of the work, or, it may need

articulating using a research narrative. Practice research includes research conducted through practice in disciplines as varied as art, architecture, dance, and music, as well as education, and health and social care, and each of which may have 'numerous discipline-specific formulations of practice research'.

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Through 2022, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded the Practice Research Voices (PR Voices) project to explore and define how existing tools and standards could more effectively support practice research, advancing an infrastructure that enables this research to be more accessible, valued, and impactful. This work, alongside the findings of the AHRC funded Sustaining Practice Assets for Research, Knowledge Learning and Education (SPARKLE) project, with whom we collaborated, highlights how enhancing the discovery and re-use of practice research, and enabling an ecosystem that recognises and values a diverse range of contributions and contributors, brings benefits to the entire scholarly communications landscape.

Practice research outputs are often multi-component, dynamic, and include text and non-text files that are added to and/or change over time. These outputs can be disseminated and hosted in several places, such as personal websites, institutional repositories, and commercial video-sharing platforms. Consequently, these components need to be aggregated in a way that maintains the context between them and which documents or evidences the research narrative. Practice research also produces non-tangible research events, such as live performances, which are not only time-based and ephemeral, but which fundamentally change their form in being captured as an output. In addition, the concept of contributorship for these outputs is much broader than 'authorship', and includes collaborators who might be curators, videographers, or choreographers, as well as participants invited to join co-creation activities.

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These factors pose a significant challenge to the capture, preservation, and reuse of practice research within existing scholarly communications infrastructure. While customised descriptions of research in institutional repositories might capture a variety of creative practice output types, this detail is lost when these specialised descriptions fail to match with existing standardized ways to describe research. And while the concepts of 'collection' and 'version' have become common with the advent of data repositories, their existing characterisations do not adequately express the relationships between practice research's aggregated and updated objects.

Practice Research Voices was a collaboration between information professionals and practice researchers, led by the University of Westminster, with partners at Jisc, King's College London, and the British Library, and software developers at Westminster's repository platform, Haplo (now Cayuse). Building on Westminster's development of their institutional repository to better represent creative practice research in art and design, the repositories workstream of the project expressed this enhanced underpinning repository schema: the 'portfolio'. The portfolio: (1) captures individual objects in the repository on an ongoing basis; (2) brings these objects together in a collection; and crucially (3) overlays narrative and context, forming a 'portfolio'.

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The key enhancement over a 'collection' as currently understood by the DataCite or DublinCore metadata schema, for example, is that the 'portfolio' recognises the research narrative and contextualising textual elements, and chronological date attributes: that is, it both aggregates objects and overlays narrative context.

Validation for the wider applicability of the 'portfolio' was completed against the schema of the British Library's Shared Research Repository for cultural and heritage organisations. While the British Library's Shared Research Repository has 'collections', they represent a post-hoc collation of outputs, rather than representing an output in its own right; nor did the 'collection' type have the time elements or narrative of the enhanced portfolio schema, proving the value of the portfolio type. We therefore take portfolios to be the key enabling feature of infrastructure that supports practice research processes, outputs, and data in a way that will improve their discoverability, reusability, and robustness.

The project workstream addressing open standards identified potential improvements to existing standards, rather than creating new ones, prioritising the Research Activity Identifier (RAiD) for portfolios; DataCite DOIs; and the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT), with potential for improvements across the landscape.

Enabling practice research affordances within the global open standards landscape, is not just important in and of itself, it is key to enabling the discovery and appreciation of more diverse research practices to global academia, decisionmakers and for teaching and learning. These projects, while primarily focused on creative practice communities, highlighted the importance of collaborating closely with all those committed to practice research. This collaboration is crucial for understanding and identifying both the technical and socio-cultural barriers — including skills and training — to enable Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable (FAIR) practice research outputs across disciplines. With the insights gathered from these projects, let us collectively work towards breaking down these

barriers and enabling the seamless management and sharing of practice research outputs across all disciplines. By doing so, we can foster a more inclusive and impactful scholarly ecosystem.

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