



Climate Stories: A creative collaboration between climate scientists, artists and the general public

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We present the experiences of Climate Stories, a collaborative project funded by the UK National Environmental Research Council (NERC). Climate Stories was developed under the aegis of WAM (Weather, Art and Music), recipient of the 2015 EMS Outreach and Communication Award. The project has been delivered by a team of scientists, artists and outreach practitioners drawn from research institutions, arts organisations and freelance backgrounds. The overall aim of the project was to approach the breaking down of barriers to understanding between climate science and the wider public by fostering new arts-based narrative skills in climate scientists under the guidance of arts practitioners, for whom storytelling lies in their professional DNA.

The first step in Climate Stories was for our cohort of 19 climate scientists to spend three days away at the beautiful Dartington Hall in Devon under the lead of artists from the disciplines of creative writing, theatre making, print making and song writing. Through a series of hands-on workshops the scientists were introduced to the narrative possibilities of each art discipline and encouraged to explore those possibilities both for their own creative development and with a view to using them in their outreach work as climate scientist. At the end of the Dartington course, each scientist chose a favoured arts discipline to take forward into a series of collaborative workshops with community groups in the Exeter area. Under the leadership of our Arts Leads, these produced a varied corpus of responses to the challenges of climate change, through a process of non-hierarchical co-creation. We present a selection of the work created along the way.

Alongside these activities, we carried out an evaluation of the progression of the climate scientists involved including identification of transformative experiences as well as development of practical skills. We outline the processes applied and some of the initial findings. Climate Stories enabled the public, artists and scientists to co-develop new creative approaches to explaining and dealing with environmental change, one based on an innovative method of engagement through shared projects. While focused in place and dealing specifically with the challenges of climate science communication, the Climate Stories project has wider relevance both geographically and in subject matter, as a blueprint for the development of more effective public engagement skills in the wider science community. We draw out lessons for further development of science communication.