Co-producing creative activities to explain research concepts

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People with learning disabilities are rarely invited to participate in research and research language is often complex and inaccessible. People with learning disabilities experience avoidable and premature deaths because of health inequalities. Their involvement in research is, therefore, crucial to tailor improvement of health services. Working in collaboration with Purple Patch Arts (PPA) who are experts in creative and accessible education and the Purple Research Group (PRG; a team of researchers with learning disabilities), we have co-created a toolkit of arts-based activities that explain research concepts in an accessible and imaginative way.

Activities

We used arts-based methods to co-design every stage of the project with learning-disabled people. We delivered 5 research sessions (RS) with the PRG and two workshops:

- *RS1 – Goal setting, project planning and logo design (Figure 1)*
- *RS2 - Identifying complex research terms & developing activities to explain them*
- *Survey for academics on research terms & format of the toolkit*
- *Workshop with People First Merseyside (PFM) to review research terms and activities*
- *RS3 – Reviewing feedback from PFM, co-writing accessible definitions of research terms*
- *Two-day workshop with PPA staff developing creative activities*
- *RS4 designing a "research day" & activities to be piloted across 13 PPA sites with 130+ people. Feedback was collated from PPA staff.*

- *RS5 revised our activities based on feedback and used a creative approach to evaluation to capture project reflections (Figure 2).*

In collaboration with the PRG, we worked with an accessible design company to produce the toolkit and visual identity.

Figure 1:

Figure 2:

The output from this project is a toolkit of activity sheets and reflection tools to be utilised by researchers interested in working with learning-disabled people. Activity sheets provide a step-by-step guide to activities that explain research concepts (e.g. Research, Consent. Anonymity & Withdrawal; see Figure 3 for a prototype). We also created a reflective tool for researchers to reflect on their approach and assumptions before they engage in these activities.

The tools are suitable to support other groups of people to engage with research, especially those with low literacy or people who do not have English as a first language. The toolkit will be on University of Leeds and PPA websites.

Figure 3:

Outcomes

Creative Inclusion was a valuable experience for all members of the team. The PRG enjoyed "planning it all out" and "liked that we all worked together".

When piloting the activities at the International Creative Research Methods Conference (Figure 4) the feedback was very positive, researchers felt they would be able to use the activities in their public engagement *("the activities were so insightful and useful")*. Social Research Association invited us to showcase our toolkit in an 'Inclusion' themed webinar.

We adapted Failspace to make it more accessible. It supported the team to set project-specific goals and reflect on their challenges and hopes. The most important aspect to all of us was that the end of this project did not mark the end of our collaboration ("We want to do more research" - PRG).

Figure 4

Learnings and Reflections

We used creative activities to support co-production, resulting in both a creative process *and* outputs. We learned about the PPA approach; how to use creative methods to aid the development of inclusive research activities. We now have a "clearer picture of how to communicate clearly about research" (PRG). These methods worked very well but required a large amount of planning and resourcing.

We have developed strong and enduring relationship with our partners, and we are committed to continuing to collaborate. However, the current financial environment makes it difficult for third sector groups to participate in unfunded activity, such as grant writing. We recommend the university provides seedcorn funding for third sector organisations to collaborate in grant writing, to acknowledge that we value their expertise.

With funders increasingly mandating public involvement in research there is a drive to engage with public partners. Public engagement must be seen as a skill to train and

develop – not assumed that everyone has it. We hope that this toolkit helps to build capacity in the public engagement workforce.

Conclusion

This project successfully co-developed a toolkit of resources to explain complex research concepts to support people with learning disabilities to become familiar with research terminology and make informed choices about research contributions.

We would like to develop our accessible version of Failspace to support other teams to conduct accessible co-production evaluation.

In the future we would like to expand our toolkit to include a variety of research concepts, designs and topics.