

WHAT'S UP WITH EVERYONE?

ANIMATED STORYTELLING FOR MENTAL HEALTH
LITERACY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE



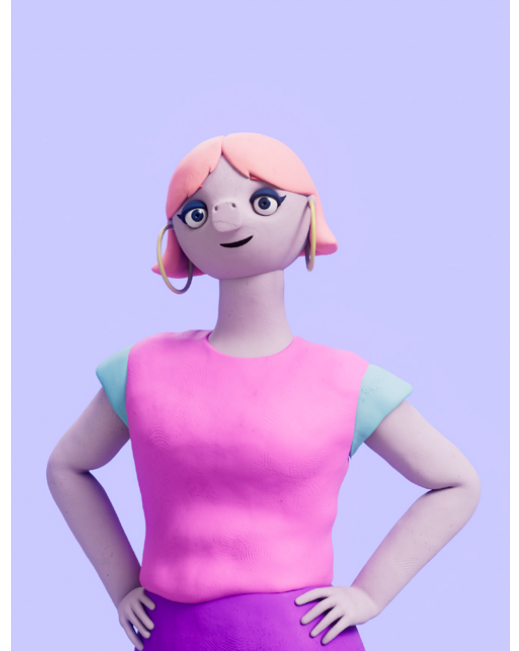
METHODOLOGY REPORT

PROFESSOR PAUL CRAWFORD: PROJECT LEAD AND PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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WUWE

Methodology Report



In our campaign *What's Up With Everyone?* we set out to gain insights on project methodology, encapsulating our learning from the process of our cross-sector project from creative industry, charity, academic/ research and clinical perspectives.

As such, this is a broad account of methodology not simply the kind limited to research activities but in creative approaches to advancing mental health support for young people; arts and humanities contributions to public mental health.

Core members of the team reported their insights about the project, its innovation, elements or processes that worked particularly well and things that worked less well.

They reported on how their particular engagement and contribution developed within or from the project during the pandemic; any adaptation on their part for those contributions; novel perspectives or ways of working.

In the reviews we gain a diverse and personal view of the processes, developments, challenges and successes for the campaign *What's Up With Everyone?*



Contributor Methodology Reviews

Tom Curran (Co-Investigator)
London School of Economics and Politics

This project has opened my eyes to new ways of doing research and working with young people. The co-creative aspect of the work has been especially illuminating and has informed considerations regarding methods taken to evaluate the effects of the animations of mental health literacy.

It was clear that awareness and knowledge were key themes for young people in what they wanted from this kind of intervention. These themes were embedded in our measures for evaluation and served to be extremely useful markers of success on key deliverables that young people themselves valued.

In terms of the evaluation itself, we use a simple

pre-post design to test whether young people reported changes in knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about mental health. The findings were complimentary for the animations and showed strong results in favor of the intervention.

COVID moved the protocol online, which was originally planned to happen in the lab, but actually, this was in keeping with the modality of the intervention itself (i.e, app and online delivery) and it complemented very well.

It was also evident that this form of testing was highly acceptable to the young people and therefore will certainly be preferred in my methodology moving forward, especially if studies involve young people.

Mike Wilson (Co-Investigator), **Antonia Liguori** (Co-Investigator),
Mel Warwick (Post-Doctoral Research Fellow)

The Storytelling Academy, Loughborough University

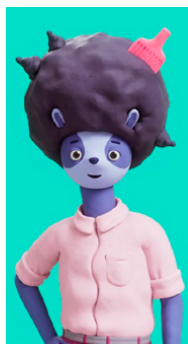
The storytelling work packages conducted as part of *What's Up With Everyone?* was particularly affected by COVID.

On the one hand it disrupted what had originally been conceived as a straightforward Digital Storytelling intervention – a series of workshops where young people would be trained in Digital Storytelling processes and have the opportunity to make their own Digital Story to reflect on mental health literacy, both before and after engaging with the Aardman animations – and on the other hand it was a disruption that necessarily led to our innovating around the methodology.

The need to move all our activity into the online space meant that our plans to conduct a series of intensive in-person workshops over a three-day had to be abandoned and we learned rapidly that the reality of online delivery demanded that we change our way of working and this delivered some unexpected benefits as the result of the new methodology.

In Phase 1, that is prior to engagement with the animations, we made the following changes:

- Gaining access to our participant groups. Our recruitment processes in the COVID landscape meant developing deeper network relationships than would have previously been required given growing anxiety among our target age groups. This included longer and more frequent phone calls to stakeholder groups to provide workshop details and extending invitations for staff members to join our workshops so that we could demystify our story development processes. This enabled support staff to provide participant support both in and outside of the workshop space.
- Retention of participants and completion of stories. Some participants struggled to stay in the workshops across the 2/3 day period. Supporters reported that this was because of stress and demotivation in the COVID lockdown period. We opened up the attendance model as widely as possible in order to enable young people to attend



on a 1-1, 2-1 or other models as they felt suitable. This meant that staffing hours increased by around 1.5 compared to normal workshop delivery, but that people were able to complete their stories.

- Evaluating the visual. We included a new analytical component into our story evaluation which focussed on the visual language developed by story creators. This was in order to align with the visual language of animation which constituted the main output of the project. We invited participants to a semi structured 1-1 interview and asked them a series of questions about the ways in which they had developed the visual component of their story. Through this we were able to ascertain the prioritizing and development of individual visual languages.

In Phase 2, that is post engagement with the animations, we made the following changes:

- Forefronting the visual focus in the story creation process. Drawing on what was learned about the interest in visual language (point 3), we highlighted this more than in previous projects. This was done by inviting conversations around how young people created stories. This related to whether they had strong visual imagery during stage/s of this process; how they decided on the visual modality they wanted to use in their story (animation, photography, found images, self-created images etc.); and what their compositional strategies were going to be (layering, use of transitions in editing).

Whilst these methodological adaptations were our responses to a situation that was forced upon us, it demanded that we look beyond our current orthodoxies for solutions and, as a result, we have developed new ways of working in the online space and given us a wider palette of methodological options for future work.

Elvira Perez Vallejos (Co-Investigator),
Sachiyo Ito-Jaeger (Post-Doctoral Research Fellow)

The University of Nottingham

Recruitment

- We successfully recruited enough participants for all three studies led by the University of Nottingham and LSE despite being in the pandemic. We managed to recruit young people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. However, the majority of participants were female. Although we aimed to recruit more male participants by exclusively recruiting them on an online recruitment website, we gained only limited interest from males.

Online focus groups (Youth Juries and TrustScapes)

- All focus groups were conducted online via Zoom as the UK was under restrictions due to Covid-19. Online focus groups certainly have advantages, such as reduced travel time for both participants and researchers. However, we learned through our experience that they also have disadvantages, such as communication difficulties (e.g., not being able to see participant's face if they decline to turn on their camera; not being able to hear participants well because of the internet problems).
- There are numerous things learned from this project. For Sachiyo, as Research Fellow, two aspects of the project had the biggest impact on her thinking as a researcher: stakeholder engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Stakeholder engagement

- Engaging with the end-users (young people) had a tremendous influence on Sachiyo's thinking as a researcher. As her background is in Experimental Psychology, which takes the positivist approach, she had less experience with the interpretive approach. In this project, she learned the importance of collaborating with end-users and feeding back their opinions and recommendations to the present and future interventions to make them as relatable and effective as possible.

Interdisciplinary collaboration with creative partners

- Another inspiring aspect of this project was collaboration with the creative partners. The positive impact that the animated films have on young people is clear, and Sachiyo felt grateful that she had the opportunity to witness how the talented Aardman Animations team created new animations.



Lucy McLaughlin (Project Associated PhD Student)
Loughborough University

One exciting aspect of the project is the light it has shed on the use of the creative arts as an effective tool in developing mental health literacy. While this is an established fact, the *What's Up With Everyone?* campaign evidences it in an accessible manner for young people.

I also don't think that the value of a creative powerhouse like Aardman giving voice to these stories, created with and for young people, can be overstated. The collaborative elements of the campaign emphasise the importance placed on what is being created and researched, putting the increased mental health literacy of young people at the forefront of the venture. This combined with the artistic weight and

international presence of Aardman allowed for an exciting, far-reaching, and evocative campaign.

The project itself motivated me to investigate the potential value of the stop-motion animation process in improving young people's mental health literacy. The outline of the campaign inspired me to combine various different strands of my academic background into one cohesive whole that will effectively comprise my PhD thesis. I consider this to be the first step in a continued process of using stop-motion animation as a tool to improve young people's mental health literacy.

Sarah Gordon (Project Associated PhD Student)
The University of Nottingham

As a designer and postgraduate researcher, *What's Up With Everyone?* provides a wealth of inspiration, from the animations themselves to co-design and adapting the study online during the pandemic.

It is a clear demonstration of creativity, academic research, clinical perspectives, and participants coming together to create something useable in academic and non-academic spaces, boosting the inclusivity of the research and opening up more channels for dissemination.

What's Up With Everyone? is an excellent reminder of the role and value of creativity, arts, and humanities in daily life and research. It shows that co-creation, community knowledge,

and public knowledge can be beneficial and do not take away from clinical routes to discussing health, rather they add to the tapestry of public health information.

For my PhD research exploring Black students' mental health, *WUWE?* is a useable example when contextualising how arts and humanities can be applied to the topic of mental health, providing a recent reference that shows the possibilities of creative research.



Ngozi Opara (Project Associated PhD Student)

Loughborough University

I know the art making process to be quite solitary—the artist must toil, alone, with both the why's and the what's of creation. However, this project externalized and slowed down planning to incorporate co-design that included and benefited from the intended audience. In this way, the project gained much of its strength, aesthetic power, and efficacy. By meeting with young people and simply asking what they want (and don't want) to see in the films, the project centered—as is the case in effective design thinking—the persona and their needs. This was not the end of the collaboration.

In addition to focus groups and co-creation meetings, the *What's Up With Everyone?* project used specialists in mental health and animation so that each subsequent stage was supported and buoyed with an expertise to activate its potential. This innovative and intentional approach makes it easy to understand why the final products were so powerful.

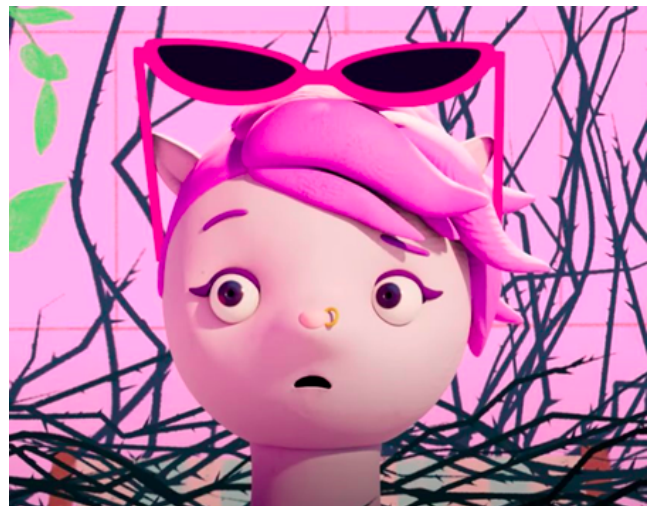
The films, as a result of these methods, are imbued with interactivity. The choices made around which topics were chosen and how they were discussed, the diversity and inclusive aesthetics of the characters, and the subtle, but powerful narratives that not only include issues but potential “solutions” act as implicit invitation for the viewer to see herself in the role of the character as they name and then overcome their various mental health difficulties.

The project also employs more explicit ways of interacting—with a website that gives clear and supportive information about how to take care of oneself and where to get help. The effects of the WUWE design are various

and powerful, as is evidenced by collected reports, but I am most excited and inspired by how the work is able to normalize, address, and make entertaining the taboo topics that many viewers, old and young, may encounter in their lives.

It is this that I take with me into my own research project—this idea that a narrative, with vulnerability and expertise at its center, can implicate an audience in a way that both allows them to see themselves, see that they are not alone, and invite reflection.

The project's methodology not only created something beautiful and enjoyable but provides the beginnings of a path towards exploratory conversations and self-understanding.



Dominique Thompson (Clinical Consultant)

Buzz Consulting

The key to success for any mental health and wellbeing awareness-raising project is engagement. Without successful audience engagement it will fall at the first post. Working with Aardman Animation was a 'win' from the beginning, as their work is consistently Oscar worthy in its levels of entertainment and engagement, whilst making a potentially challenging topic feel accessible, reassuring, and informative.

As a clinician I was delighted to be invited to work with Aardman on an innovative new way of bringing emotional literacy to huge numbers of young adults. Animation has rarely been used with such success or wide-reaching impact as it was in this project, combining relatable characters, co-created stories and scripts and expert clinical information. The short videos manage to convey a crucial wellbeing message in a very short space of time, whilst feeling chatty, inclusive, funny, yet practical, and with a core empowerment message at the end of each.

The core leadership team at the very beginning of the project (strategy, artistic and clinical) was clear that working with the target audience would be vital to ensure authenticity of message, but also to avoid cliché and any accusations of

being 'out of touch' with current culture. This co-creation aspect was very successful. Young people jumped at the chance to be involved and shape a resource for their peers, and they brought invaluable current insights into their world, and the culture that they are immersed in.

As a clinician I sat in on focus groups and reviewed topic discussions, provided a safe space for any emotional distress, and facilitated discussions alongside an expert psychologist. Moving the groups online in the pandemic was a challenge, as young people are less likely to speak up on camera, but despite this, the information and feedback gleaned was extremely helpful. Co-creation is an essential aspect of any health promotion project, and *What's Up With Everyone?* achieved this consistently.

My hope is that in future more campaigns will use animation of various types to communicate with a wide range of people about powerful and important health topics without making them feel more anxious, yet still encouraging them to take control of their wellbeing and personal mental health. The research aspect of the campaign will guide us as to how this could be done. It has been a privilege to be involved.

David Crepaz-Keay (Named Researcher and Head of Empowerment and Social Inclusion)

Mental Health Foundation

What's Up With Everyone? has been a unique endeavour in a number of respects. The use of animation as an approach to improving mental health literacy has made potentially difficult topics accessible and interesting to a student audience. The degree and quality of engagement in the production process offered benefits both to project design and longer-term student engagement.

The chosen topics complemented the choice of mental health literacy as a frame for the project. *WUWE?* has complemented and advanced our existing work on student mental health and highlighted the potential of creative approaches to engaging people in mentally healthy thinking.

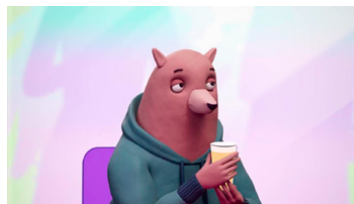


Lorna Probert (Head of Interactive Production)

Aardman Animations Ltd.

The innovation from our perspective felt to be developing an intervention to support young people's mental health where all aspects were steered directly by the audience we were setting out to support – from the kind of help they felt they needed, overcoming the barriers to them accepting that help, real challenges they face, content that appeals and resonates and places where we might reach this audience. Through this it felt that we genuinely had created content that this audience connected with, that could actually impact on their current and future mental health wellbeing.

Finding young co-creators was more challenging than we had anticipated, particularly during Covid times. We have lots of experience recruiting for and running focus groups and user testing but this was a bit different. We wanted to find young people that represented a diverse cross section of society, from across the country, who had lived mental health experiences to share but whom were comfortable talking in a group and contributing to ideas and feedback. These are not all things you can necessarily advertise for or tell immediately once you speak to someone so it took longer than we imagined to find and solidify our co-creation group.



We found focusing co-creation sessions around a proposed concept/s or specific questions was more constructive than an open discussion forum where it was harder to get ideas and feedback started. It also goes without saying, that every person is unique so across many co-creators there were differing opinions and perspectives so it was important for our directors to balance these with defining a clear message and approach.

Similarly, with so many project partners we found structured input and feedback more constructive to avoid it being a solution designed by committee with no central vision at its heart.

The timelines and processes for research sectors and commercial production are very different. On an animation production we tend to assemble a team who together work solidly on the production in a linear fashion until it's complete. Of course we are used to waiting for feedback from partners or testing with audiences but the longer gaps for research and

testing required for this kind of project meant it was hard to ensure continuity of the team as they moved onto other productions or in some cases left to have babies!

Although there were many ambitious ideas for how the website element of the project could manifest, the fact that this project was for a fixed period of time really limited what we could ultimately deliver. We were acutely aware that we needed to provide something that couldn't rely on ongoing updates, support or moderation because this would only be available for a limited amount of time and we didn't want to start something young people might become reliant on and then pull this away. We discussed this with co-creators and followed their guidance for the most effective offering with these constraints but because of this we feel the website is less innovative and less impactful than we have been able to achieve with the films which were much better suited to this window of time.

The major impact of the pandemic on the project was that we needed to run the workshops remotely rather than face to face as we had originally intended. This had some benefits in that it allowed us to more freely recruit and bring together young people across the country which might not have been feasible in person and allowed us to have more sessions that we had planned because of the reduced costs. It did however make these sessions harder to run as it was much harder to establish connections between our team and the co-creators and between the co-creators themselves working remotely and therefore harder to encourage discussion and debate.

The other impact was that our wider project team was not able to meet face to face through the whole of the production and research phases which no doubt reduced the potential for collaboration.

The project has shown us how vital it is to closely involve young people in the discussion and creation around resources to support their mental health and not to make any assumptions about how what they need, like and feel. It has highlighted that by doing this we can achieve greater connection and therefore greater impact.

Conclusions and recommendations

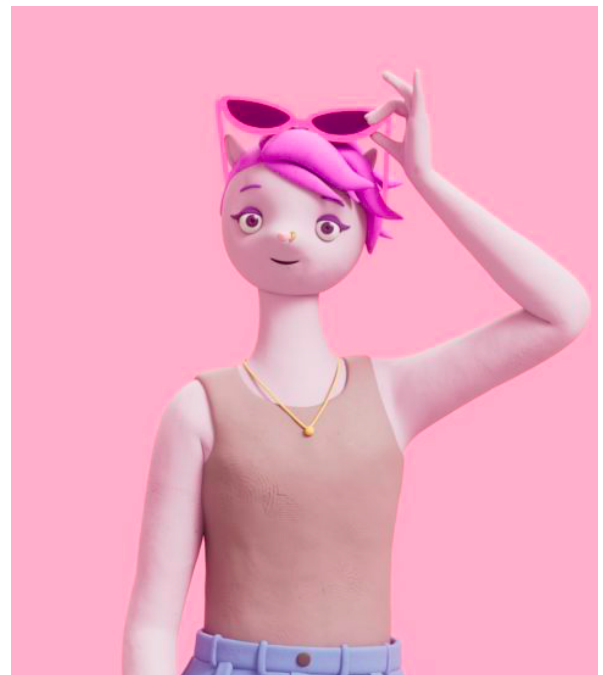
The main take-away from our review of methodology is the vital need for flexibility and agility, especially in times of uncertainty. We were not only working in times of uncertainty, but times of severe disruption from the pandemic. This had a major effect on how we delivered the project and we had to make some major adaptations to the work without, we believe, compromising its quality. It was not only a case of us not being able to do exactly what we planned, or having to adapt to multiple, unexpected personnel changes, but also the young people we were working with were unable to get involved in exactly the way we had originally envisaged. In order to carry out the project we needed to be confident in our ability to abandon our original plans and expectations and reconceive new plans to suit the new context.

We had to make multiple adjustments to keep largely to the timeline and milestones, revisiting cross teams relationships and communication, and extending the project by 3 months to afford greater opportunity to enhance recruitment young people for the storytelling workshops and approach our estimated archive target of 60 digital stories. Yet the adversities of the pandemic also liberated us to think creatively about solutions and gave us license to find new ways of working and to develop our methodologies. Coinciding with the onset of the pandemic, the team quickly shifted to virtual/ digital mode and home working as well as dealing with their own personal impacts from the crisis.

While bringing a profound physical dislocation and desocialising for the team, not least appointed PDRAs and participants, the difficulties faced actually enriched our methodological palette, even if we had to scale down other ambitions. For example, our hope had been for physical placement of PDRAs and PhD students at Aardman to share, learn, innovate and bridge new legacy projects and initiatives but these were not possible in the pandemic restrictions. We have adapted here to explore the feasibility of a physical meeting event at Aardman towards the close of the extended project budget in June to celebrate what we have achieved and to seed new collaborative possibilities.

A key recommendation in light of the highly successful project despite the pandemic, is for research teams to give themselves permission to be flexible to rethink plans and not be too tied down to a project plan that has been designed before the project has started – when plans meet reality then things often need to change, especially for work that is co-produced with community partners.

In fact, one might argue that the degree of flexibility required is directly relational to the level of true collaboration and partnership with community stakeholders; it is exactly this that can lead to true methodological innovation. The challenges we faced are actually a strong argument for co-produced knowledge and co-research practices.



RESEARCH PARTNERS

