

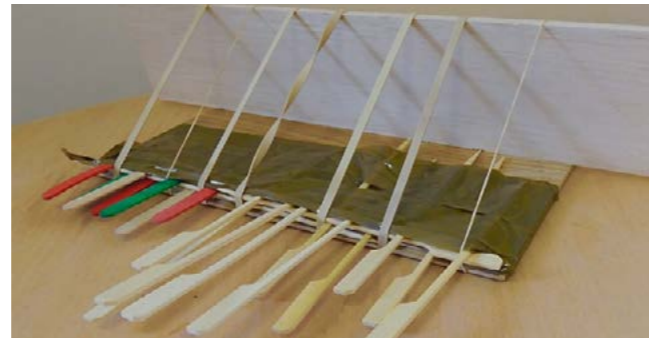


Ageing Playfully: Summary Report

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Clockwise from top left:

Figure 1. Percussion board
co-designed by Ageing
Playfully Participants

Figure 2. String board
co-designed by Ageing
Playfully Participants

Figure 3. Xylophone board
co-designed by Ageing
Playfully Participants

Figure 4. Maracas and shakers
set co-designed by Ageing
Playfully Participants

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the people with dementia and their carers who took part in the various workshops and events organised by the Ageing Playfully project at Dolphinlee House and the Neuro Drop-In Centre; the Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster office) team and community support staff; and our funders, the Arts and Humanities Research Council Creative Exchange Research Project.

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Executive summary

Ageing Playfully is a collaborative project between Lancaster University and Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster office) that brings academics, designers and artists together with people with early stage dementia, their carers and Age UK community workers involved in their care.

The project acknowledges the need for innovative and creative ways to engage with, and support, the increasing numbers of older people with dementia in the UK in their daily activities.

The aim of the project was to offer a creative, playful and supportive space during a series of workshops, where people with dementia could be given the opportunity to co-design 2D collages and 3D models, and thereby stimulate and facilitate their physical mobility, imagination, and social interaction in the group.

The workshops (four of them) were set up within the context of an existing weekly drop-in activity, run as part of the Age UK Lancashire 'circle of support' initiative. The project team invited those people with dementia and their carers, who already attended the Neuro Drop-In centre, to take part in the workshops. Twelve participants with dementia agreed to take part, with two carers and two support workers also attending part or all of the sessions.

Activities included a warm up session, such as games and singing; and with everyone working in small groups a creative co-design modelling session based on themes chosen by the participants. Themes focused in the first workshop on the type of things people most enjoyed such as being outdoors in the garden, having meals, dancing, and singing or social activities. The second session, focused on participants in small groups creating 3D models of their favourite garden. The main theme that subsequently emerged was music and in the remaining two workshops participants co-designed musical, mainly percussive models, using a range of art and modelling materials.

Participants as co-designers expressed enjoyment and enthusiasm when given this opportunity to engage playfully with each other in imagining and building models. Their carers and support workers noted how the workshop activities seemed to encourage interaction, with

even the reticent, less confident members of the group joining in with the model building.

The project team encouraged interaction in two other ways outside of each immediate workshop session. Firstly, each participant was sent a postcard with a picture of the 2D or 3D model they had been involved in creating. This helped each person to remember the previous activities and their part in the model building in their groups, and also to be reminded of the next workshop. Secondly, following the session, after the participants' lunch break, the team showed them the models again and everyone was reminded about the session, and they could share some feedback.

This first phase of co-design is planned to lead to a second phase of development using the participants' models to explore potential digital-physical technologies, which could creatively enhance physical mobility and mental facility and imagination for those with dementia, and their carers and community workers.



Figure 5. Workshop One "Our favourite things": A 'mood board' or collaborative collage making by Ageing Playfully co-designers favourite past, present, indoor and outdoor activities. Different materials and images used; stickers, stamps, coloured pens, playful cards.



Figure 6. Workshop Two "Our very own garden": co-designers modelling their ideal garden and garden activities and features.



Figure 7. Workshop Three "Our own musical instruments": Co-designers imagining and building their own musical instruments by incorporating a large range of materials.

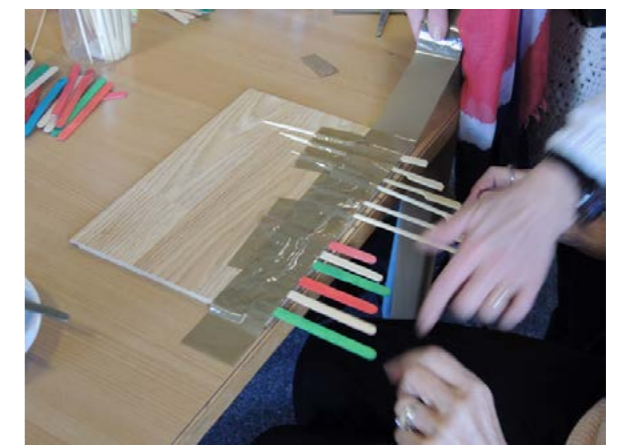


Figure 8. Workshop Four "Our own musical band": Co-designed model of musical instrument set based on xylophone and percussion types.

1. Introduction

Ageing Playfully was a collaborative project bringing together academic researchers, designers and artists, from Lancaster University and professionals from Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster office), to work with a community of people in the early stages of dementia and their caregivers.

Ageing Playfully was designed and funded as part of the Creative Exchange, an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Knowledge Exchange Hub, which aims to catalyse processes of collaboration between academics and non-academics by working together on imaginative and innovative products, services and experiences via a series of short projects.

The Ageing Playfully project overall aim was to create a space for professionals from Age UK, designers, artists, caregivers and people with dementia, to exchange lived experiences and expertise, and thus contribute to a better understanding of how digital-physical interactions may foster well-being through movement and exercise for people with dementia.

In this project, an opportunity was created for researchers and older people with dementia to work together to co-design mobility and wellbeing interventions that could potentially improve their quality of life, and empower them to become designers themselves. Who better to understand the values, needs and aspirations of someone with dementia than those with dementia? Through a series of playful activities and by fostering creativity, motivation and imagination, our participants were facilitated to evolve ideas to create plans or models (prototypes) that encouraged playful activities to support their continuing physical mobility and creativity.

Ageing Playfully has two distinct phases; the first is the co-design research project reported here. The second phase will be developed from ideas generated in the research, which will be taken forward as a design brief by the research project team. In the second design brief phase we propose to explore potential digital-physical technologies that could be developed from the co-designed objects from the research. Such objects may have the potential to shape experiences that may contribute to everyday wellbeing and enhanced physical mobility of people with dementia and their carers.

In this summary report we describe the key recommendations emerging from the project on how to plan and facilitate creative and playful workshops with people with dementia. For more information on the project findings, the workshop contents, research methods and findings, please download the full design report available the [project website](#). The project focused on four workshops (namely: 'Our favourite things', 'Our very own garden', 'Our very own musical instrument' and 'Our very own musical band') with an Age UK Lancashire dementia support community. Each of the co-design workshops informed the next one, fostering creativity and ownership, and aiming to offer a "feel good" experience. A [video](#) journey of the project is also available for viewing, which summarises the project and its main findings.

2. Workshop tools, strategies and activities

How exactly were the workshops facilitated? And what sort of dynamics were in place? The activities were devised in ways that ensured both participants and research team kept the process simple and fun and this could be inclusive but allow individual expression. Below are some of the activities that proved successful in the co-design workshops:

Icebreaker activities

Icebreaker activities, run at the start of every workshop, were important as a way to help to relieve stress, reduce tension and encourage a more immediate involvement by participants. The activity was designed to help them to relax, thereby allowing them to be more receptive to listening and contributing. Some icebreaker activities were inspired by those used by the support circle; it was a way to maintain a familiar activity that helped to build confidence in this new workshop situation.

Hot Potato



Figure 9. Inspired by the game: 'Pass the parcel'. Instead of the 'parcel', a colourful soft ball/fluffy pillow was passed like a 'hot potato' while music was played.

This activity was inspired by the game: 'Pass the parcel'. Instead of the 'parcel', a colourful soft ball/fluffy pillow was passed like a 'hot potato' while music was played. Whoever had the ball when the music stopped had to answer a question matching the theme of the workshop. For example, in Workshop Two the question was, "what do you like to do in the garden?" In Workshop Three: "what is your favourite musical instrument?" or in Workshop Four: 'make the sound of favourite instrument.' The addition of the soft toy followed the idea that people with dementia enjoy interaction with physical, ludic (playful) objects, especially soft fabrics, texture based materials and colourful materials. Touching textiles, squeezing and rubbing the soft ball with the hands thus becomes quite important as a way of people to engage with the activity.

Opening song

From the first workshop the research team observed that music seemed very important. For instance, it was evident that songs "stayed" with the participants, so they kept on humming and tapping its rhythm. The song chosen in the first session was a classic from the 1960s, Morecambe & Wise, 'Bring me sunshine', as it was easy to remember and popular. In the next workshop sessions the team experimented with more rhythmic music, like Miriam Makeba's song 'Pata Pata'. At the start of the last workshop the team used the contemporary 'Happy' by Pharrell Williams. All these songs worked well in engaging and prompting participants to join in with the singing, even if they did not necessarily know the song well. This would suggest that the song did not need to be reminiscent, but that new or less well known music was also welcomed and effective for people to be involved in the activity.

Main activities in the workshops

Collaborative collage



Figure 10. This activity was useful when setting up the project, providing a tool that participants could use to map out themes around their 'favourite things', and which offered direction to the project.

This activity was useful when setting up the project, providing a tool that participants could use to map out themes around their 'favourite things', and which offered direction to the project. Using prepared postcards that showed images of everyday activities was found to help participants open up conversations about preferences, needs and values. Participants as co-designers were then free to choose and connect activities shown on the cards to make a collective collage complete with written comments, some of their own and group support team drawings, and stickers. This approach, that combined images and written materials, followed Sleeswijk Visser et al. (2005), who describe the benefits of co-designing using a 'toolkit' with collage materials (with visual images and some tools to shape or cut these up and attach to the board) and cognitive materials (stickers, pens and so on for written input). The activity appeared to successfully accomplish the objective by facilitating preliminary conversations and using visual media to collect ideas. However, there were some limitations to the activity. Due to mobility or sight problems not everybody was able to cut out with scissors or work with stickers. To overcome this problem in subsequent workshops, the team opted to provide simpler modelling materials that required less cutting out or tool based modelling. This led to a more participant led approach in terms of the way they choose items and added these to the models, and they were less reliant on team members to translate those ideas into materials.

Collective Modelling in Small Groups



Figure 11. A variety of playful materials were collected. Simple and ludic materials were the most favourite.

Collective modelling was inspired by the concept of 'rapid prototyping' techniques. Rapid prototyping is a group of techniques used to quickly create a scale model of a physical part using three-dimensional physical or digital models (Carlopio, 2010). This approach was favoured by the Ageing Playfully project. The 3D modelling was not only collective as a process but the fact it was hands-on seemed to be a way participants as co-designers could open up imaginative narratives via the modelling materials, and the process of modelling together. The tactile element of the activity was a definitive feature by which participants could explore and play with different materials and objects. They could stick materials together and build up the models in playful ways. This demonstrably was a very engaging method of connecting with people and their ideas, allowing them to go beyond conversation into the visual image and tactile 3D model. Material modelling, thus, resulted in the activities being highly participatory and inclusive, and this approach managed to engage even the more introverted workshop participants. Modelling activities employed a range of materials. The variety and the simplicity of the materials, the ludic and colourful range of textiles and plastics invited rich and immediate responses, with participants wanting to touch, rattle, build and combine materials. Using foam boards as the model base, the favourite materials were Lego, plasticine and textiles with different textures and colours. The resources also included 'Little People' Lego toy characters, tins, cans, sticks, spoons, pans, plastics pots, small glasses and cups, glue, pins, feathers, strings, elastic bands, inflatable balloons, stickers, bottles and beans. The selection of the materials tended to exclude pre-made or excessively instructive resources, favouring simple, playful and fun ones.

Narrative and sharing activities

Emerging Narratives: Imagining, abstracting and representing

Providing the range of modelling materials encouraged the group members to agree that one or another object would represent different things, and that it would be perfectly acceptable to change an object's meaning in combination with other materials. Changes in scale and colour led, at times, to humorous situations and so the stories would develop and transform, inspiring participants as co-designers to immerse themselves into some intricate representations with fully developed storylines. There were two ways the research team made use of continuing storylines to emphasise the event and to provide a reminder for the next event:



Figure 12. Co-designers negotiated that one or another object would represent different things and ideas: flowers, green house, herbs and vegetables. Participants discuss names of plants and how to represent them.



Figure 13. Changes in scale and colour led, at times, to humorous situations and so the stories would develop and transform, inspiring participants as co-designers to immerse themselves into some intricate representations with fully developed storylines.

Show and Tell

After every Ageing Playfully workshop participants had lunch together. Then they continued with other weekly activities planned by the Age UK Lancaster's usual circle of support. After lunch, the Ageing Playfully research team took all the co-designed models into the lunchroom to show participants the work made during the workshop. This simple mechanism reaffirmed the participants as co-designers. They could appreciate their group model, and thus were given an opportunity to feel that all the play led to something valued by the whole group. This helped to close the session on a positive note.



Figure 14. The Ageing Playfully research team took all the co-designed models into the lunchroom to show participants the work made during the "Our favourite things" workshop.

Postcard Memento

After each co-design workshop one of the Ageing Playfully team sent a postcard to each of the participants. The postcards were created from photos of the model and personalised with a note. This was a physical memento that recapped what had been designed and reminded each participant about the next workshop. This connection with the participants was meant to be a simple but meaningful gesture, which created empathy and helped them feel considered. The postcards also aimed to act as a medium whereby embodied memories of the workshop in physical objects could be kept by the participants and re-visited, stimulating their memories of the activities. This seemed to work well; some participants kept the postcards in their personal handbag and proudly showed them to each other. Maintaining actual correspondence with participants appeared to create significant engagement with the Ageing Playfully activities.

3. Key recommendations

In this section the key messages and recommendations are summarised, together with some thoughts on the personal experience of the research team involved in this project and developing approaches to engage with people with dementia as co-designers.

Key messages

A number of key messages and recommendations can be taken from the research work conducted during the Ageing Playfully project. The key benefits and messages are described below:

- Creative activities in a group workshop environment can make an active contribution to the improvement of the quality of life of people with dementia.
- Creative ‘making’ activities that stimulate multisensory experiences, including tactile, auditory and visual, can be especially helpful by increasing the engagement, social inclusion and upper body movement of people with dementia.
- Well-facilitated workshops, such as those run by the Ageing Playfully project, can help in uplifting the mood of people with dementia and contribute to social connectedness.
- Staff at Age UK Lancashire commended the design and facilitation of the workshops, as they observed the events encouraged people with dementia to engage at a high level with activities and others in their group.
- The research has suggested the development of a workshop facilitation musical instrument based toolkit as a means of increasing social interaction skills and mental wellbeing for people with dementia and to encourage their upper body movement.
- The project team has prepared this freely available design report to illustrate the lessons learnt from this pilot project and provide some recommendations on how facilitators may run workshops in a similar fashion.

Key recommendations

Thirteen key recommendations based on the data analysis, experience and lessons learnt through this project are summarised below. These are divided into pre-workshop engagement, workshop planning, workshop running and post-workshop engagement:

Pre-workshop engagement

Engage with workshop participants and carers, support staff several weeks prior to the start of the workshops.

This is essential in getting to know the people you will be working with, but more crucially when working with people with dementia, early pre project or workshop contact helps significantly in encouraging people to become comfortable with you. It is recommended that you attend existing drop-in sessions (coffee and tea meet-ups, lunch clubs, support groups, etc.) and gradually contribute and get to know people involved.

Workshop planning

Carefully select the workshop room/venue and set-up according to individual and group needs.

If possible it is recommended that workshops run in the same location as an existing group session takes place or choose another familiar venue. Comfortable chairs are crucial as mobility issues are common with such groups.

Share and discuss your planned activities with support staff or other professionals working with dementia groups for feedback, and include activities that the group is already more or less familiar

Routine is important! Changes in the routine have to be carefully explained, as any new activity or idea could be a bit stressful. Hence heeding the advice and feedback of existing support staff about your planned activities is most useful.

Running the workshops

Start the workshop with an icebreaking or warming up activity each time.

Icebreaker activities, run at the start of every workshop, are important as a way to help to relieve stress, reduce tension and encourage a more immediate involvement by participants. The activity should be designed to help workshop participants to relax, thereby allowing them to be more receptive to listening and contributing.

Workshops should not be more than two hours in duration and should include several breaks with refreshments in between.

It is recommended that workshops do not start any earlier than 11 am, as people with dementia need ample time to prepare and reach the workshop venue. This is particularly important if some form of public transport is used but still useful if people are relying on a dedicated door to door service. Ideally workshops should start with some refreshments (tea, coffee and biscuits) as this provides an opportunity for socialising.

Include model-making activities in the workshop to get participants engaged, excited and active.

Material modelling in the activities has the potential of being highly participatory and inclusive, and this approach can actively engage even the more introvert workshop participants. The tactile element of such activities includes sculpting and sticking materials together and building up the models in playful ways. This is a very engaging method of connecting with people and their ideas, allowing them to go beyond conversation into tactile and visual expression via the 3D model.

When using model-making activities reassure participants that modelling is not about making something perfect or beautifully finished but to represent different things/ideas.

Providing the range of modelling materials will encourage group members to agree that one or another object would represent different things, and that it would be perfectly acceptable to change an object’s meaning in combination with other materials.

Combine storytelling with the model-making activities to increase playfulness and allow participants to develop rich stories and express themselves.

The telling of stories and the imagining of scenes and representations of various objects will enable the group to have fun sharing and creating stories as they model them. Changes in scale and colour can lead to humorous situations as the stories develop and transform, inspiring participants as co-designers to immerse themselves into some intricate representations with fully developed storylines.

Select and use materials that are colourful, playful, tactile, textile-based to enhance participant engagement and creativity.

The variety and the simplicity of the materials, the ludic, playful and colourful range of textiles and plastics invites rich and immediate responses, with participants wanting to touch, rattle, build and combine materials. People with dementia enjoy interaction with physical objects, especially soft fabrics, texture based materials and colourful materials. Touching textiles, squeezing and rubbing soft objects with the hands thus becomes quite important as a way for people to engage with an activity.

Use pre-prepared and pre-cut materials that do not require fine dexterity but are easy to manipulate and use.

Sometimes people with dementia have limited dexterity skills. For example, not everybody is able to cut out with scissors or work with stickers. Hence, providing simpler modelling materials that required less cutting out and manipulation can ensure that everyone can participate in the modelling activities.

Create a space for co-creation and collaboration to increase socialisation amongst workshop participants, fun and engagement.

Facilitate the workshop activities in small groups of no more than 3-4 people with one or two carers/ supporters. This helps to avoid people feeling overwhelmed by too much interaction with people, instead to feel able to be part of a small more manageable number. The result is more likely to be participants appreciating their group’s model and to feel part of the process. This can give them the opportunity to feel that all the play led to something valued by the whole group.

Incorporate music in several of your workshop activities to increase participant engagement, physical activity, fun and reminiscing.

In music based/related workshops there is the potential for all participants to become involved in a noisy amalgam of singing, tapping, drumming and beating. Following the rhythm of certain spontaneous melodies seems to trigger some participants to recall the lyrics of the songs and this can stimulate memories about a or times in their life where those songs were played.

Post-workshop

Follow up between each workshop and provide participants with a physical memento related to a workshop activity.

After each workshop create and send (preferable via post) a physical memento postcard that recaps what had been designed in that workshop. Postcards also will remind each participant about the following workshop. This connection with the participants is a simple but meaningful gesture, which creates empathy and helps them feel considered. The postcards can also act as a medium whereby embodied memories of the workshop in physical objects could be kept by the participants and re-visited, stimulating their memories of the activities.

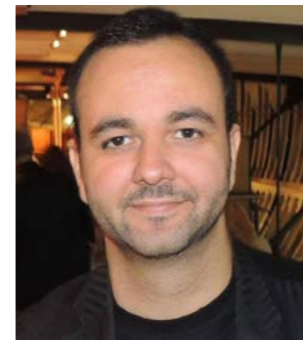
Personal experience

What is it like to work with participants with dementia?

Facilitating Ageing Playfully co-design workshops, particularly for those members of the team without any previous carer training or experience of dementia, was an incredibly stimulating and rewarding experience. The workshop participants were able to form a group with great enthusiasm for creative activities, and they expressed enjoyment attending the workshops every week. Engaging with people with early stages of dementia in a creative way, as well as bringing back their prototype designs to the design studio and thinking about how to develop these, was not just a process of working towards the specific deliverables of the project. The process also meant facilitating social inclusion and wellbeing around people with some of the most need in the community.

The Ageing Playfully project experience suggests that an emphasis on personal stories, on individual identities, and the value of people's ideas, can potentially seem to have an impact not just in the quantifiable aspects of care, but in what it means to suffer from dementia.

4. Research team



Dr Emmanuel Tseklevs is a senior lecturer in design interactions at Imagination@Lancaster. Emmanuel designs interactions between people, places and products in the areas of health, ageing and well-

being, by employing creative design methods with digital technology. Emmanuel is interested in the co-design of playful artefacts and interactions that link the digital with the physical world and that encourage and empower the general public as well as people with lifelong and progressive disabilities and their carers to develop design solutions for themselves.



Dr Amanda Bingley is a lecturer in health research in the Division of Health Research, Faculty of Health and Medicine. Amanda is involved in work with the Centre for Ageing Research and has an interest in research with older

(and younger people) with a focus on health and place. When facilitating research with people of all ages she works with a range of qualitative approaches including narrative, ethnographic, creative arts and participatory research methods.



Ms Malé Luján Escalante is a The Creative Exchange PhD researcher in the area of Digital Public Space, exploring Materiality and In-materiality of physical-digital experiences in making. Male is especially

interested in memory processes and time experience that she is approaching by experimenting with diffractive methodologies.



Mr Adrian Gradinar is a Creative Exchange PhD student conducting research in the area of the digital public space, exploring the Internet of Things and how digital information can be integrated with familiar objects. Adrian is also inter-

ested in game design theories and how digital games could be interconnected with the physicality of the surrounding world

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