

COLOUR AND EMOTION

MEASURING WELLBEING CREATIVELY

Michael Dean (UCL Communication Clinic), Nuala Morse (UCL Culture), Nir Segal & Jo Volley (Slade School of Fine Art)



WHAT IS WELLBEING?

Wellbeing can be defined as: “**Good mental states**, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives, and the affective reactions of people to their experiences.”¹ Wellbeing includes emotions, such as **happiness**, but also **interest, engagement, meaning and satisfaction**.

AND WHY ARE WE INTERESTED IN IT?

Measuring wellbeing is important for public policy, to assess social progress and outcomes. It helps organisations **improve** the design and delivery of **cultural activities** (e.g. museums, galleries, arts programmes). Improvements in wellbeing are also important outcomes for **health interventions** such as speech and language therapy. Researchers want to measure wellbeing to learn whether these activities and interventions are worthwhile.

Most measures of wellbeing rely on language, for example using interviews or questionnaires. This means they are not always appropriate for people with communication difficulties such as **aphasia** (the language impairments acquired following brain injury).

THE MEASURING WELLBEING CREATIVELY PROJECT

The aim of the project was to develop a method for **people with communication difficulties to express their wellbeing** in a way that could be recorded and understood by others.

It brought together artists, a human geographer, a speech and language therapist and a group of adults with acquired communication difficulties, in a series of co-production activities. **Co-production** means that the final outcome developed out of the ideas, feedback and choices of all participants as they experienced working together. It was not planned by the researchers. The project included 3 workshops, home exercises and a symposium. Seven people with aphasia took part.

Workshops

We first looked at works of art that used colour in striking ways. Participants chose pictures and described how they made them feel.

Participants were given **words** that might produce a **feeling**. They chose a colour that – for whatever reason – they felt went with each word.

We used coloured **stickers** as these are easy to handle.



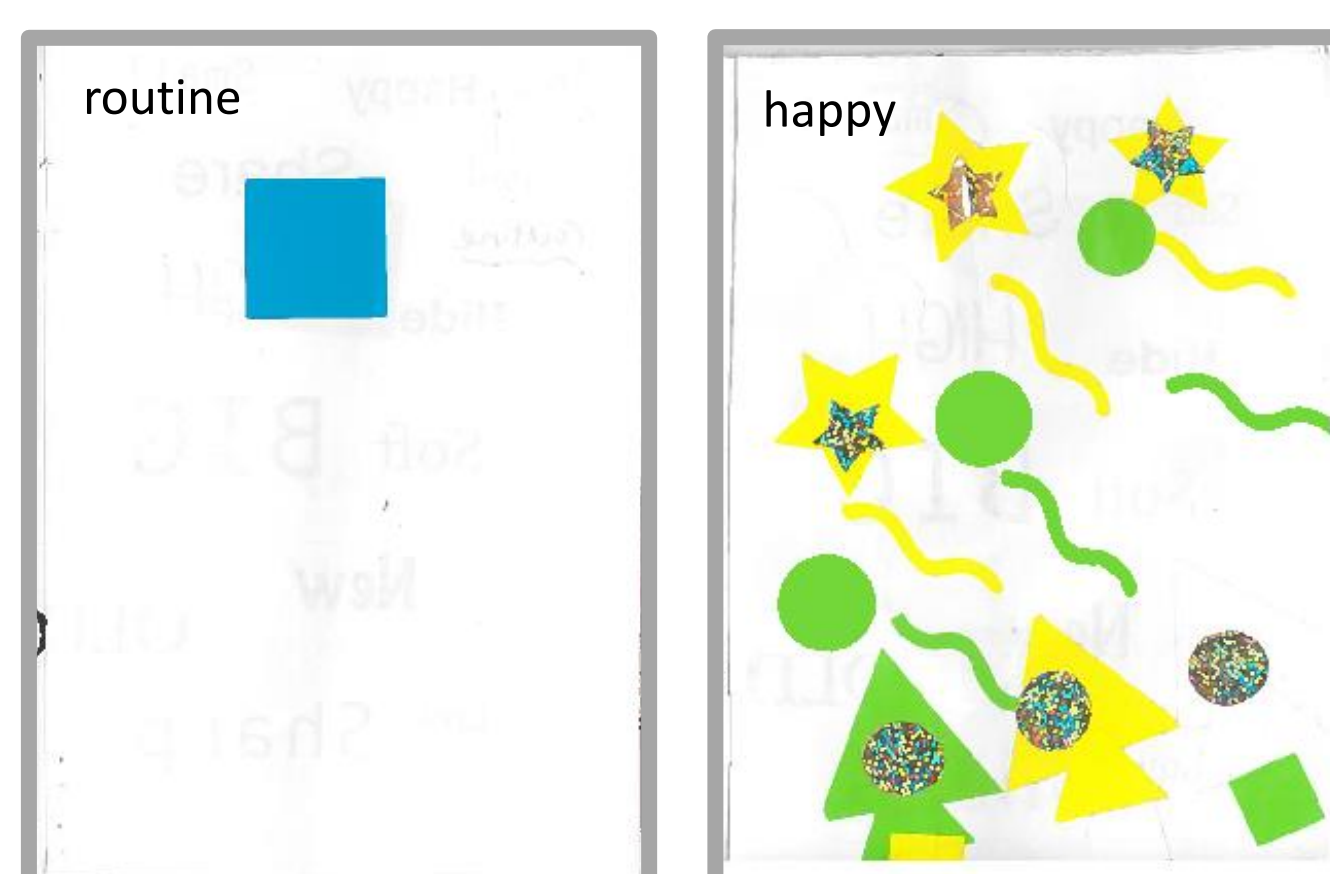
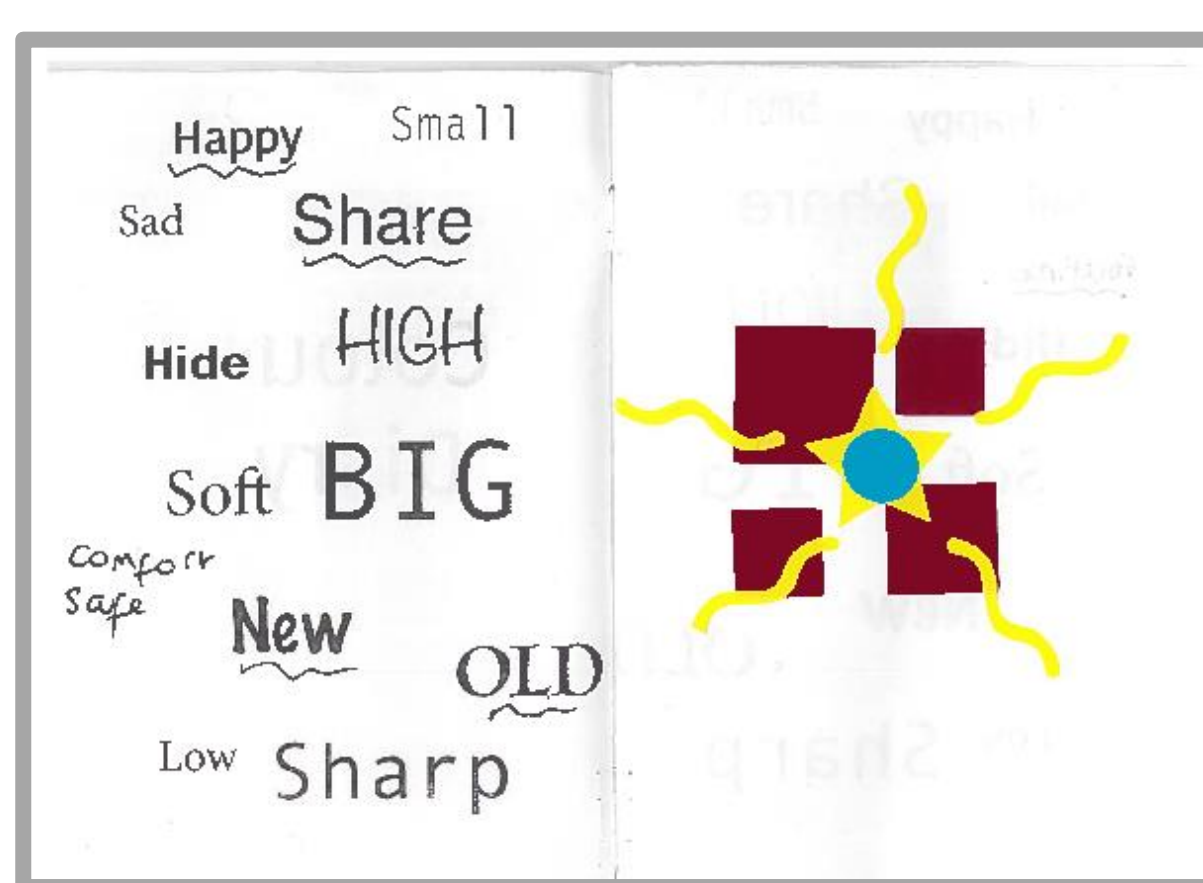
Each person made their own **colour board**.

We found that for a small number of words similar colour choices were made by different people (e.g. dark, mute colours for ‘sad’). For other words, people’s choices were quite individual. **People had different ‘colour vocabularies.’**

Next we included different **shapes** and **sizes** of the coloured stickers.



People could combine these in any way they wanted. Participants shared their images. This led to **discussion** between the image maker and viewer about the choices that had been made.



Participants decided that a **diary** would be a good format for exploring colours and emotions. The images can be saved and shown to other people. Looking through the diary might show changes over time. A significant life event might lead to a different kind of image.

Home exercises

Participants repeated the workshop activities at home so we could explore consistency in choices. Prototype colour diaries were made and each participant added to one every day for a week.

Symposium

A symposium was organised. Thirty-six people attended, including the workshop participants, other people with communication difficulties, museum researchers, artists and speech and language therapists. People tried out activities from the workshops and the Colour Diary. Comments included:

We were thinking together, changing together. If you are with someone they can help you to see together. You have a go, and then you think again

Life is both words and non-words, but giving voice is the most important

Engagement is part of wellbeing; engagement with the activity itself can enhance wellbeing

[Useful] as a means of initial communication and as an ice-breaking exercise. Also useful for participants to evaluate the sessions

Expression was more open because of the choice of materials and curiosity

...measuring wellbeing visually could not work without the participants establishing their own individual way of expressing. Once this was established it enabled a line of communication with which the visual elements became an instrument for sharing participants' wellbeing

WHAT NEXT?

Activities based on the workshops, the Colour Diary and sets of stickers will be **published** together as The Colour and Emotion Toolkit (Slade Press, 2017). We will find out what users think of this.

There will be an **exhibition** of images made during the project: Colour & Emotion UCLH Arts Street Gallery 14th Jan – 21st Feb 2018.

Reference: ¹OECD (2013), *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, p.29, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Image credits: Nir Segal, Tom Jenkins

