HeadStart Kernow Learning:
Testing interactive software as an online engagement method

(July 2020)

Background

The Coronavirus Lockdown in the UK (started 23 March 2020) meant that all youth engagement moved online. HeadStart Kernow was invited to lead on the review a mental health website called Mental Health for Life (http://mentalhealthforlife.org/) by the developer (Professor Kam Bhui) and Falmouth University (Anna Mankee-Williams). HeadStart Kernow is part of Cornwall Council and works closely with Young People Cornwall and Ambitions.

About HeadStart Kernow	About Mental Health for Life website
Started in 2016, HeadStart is a five-year, £58.7 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HeadStart aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing. To do this, six local authority led HeadStart partnerships are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design and try out new Facilitator interventions that will make a difference to young people's mental health, wellbeing and resilience. The HeadStart partnerships are in the following locations in England: Blackpool; Cornwall; Hull; Kent; Newham; Wolverhampton.	Promoting Mental Health 4 Life (MH4L) is a learning resource to help individuals and organisations improve both their own mental health and the mental health of the people they serve. This work was led by Professor Kamaldeep Bhui, Professor of Psychiatry and Cultural Psychiatry and Epidemiology at Queen Mary University of London, Consultant Psychiatrist at East London Foundation Trust, and co-founder of Careif. This project was funded by the Health Education North Central and East London (HENCEL) and was supported by Dr. Geraldine Strathdee, the National Clinical Director for Mental Health, NHS England.
About Ambitions	**About Young People Cornwall**
Ambitions is a project for young people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly which is managed by CSW Group and funded by the European Social Fund. They support unemployed and economically inactive 15-24 year olds to find their way into education, employment (including self-employment) or training. Ambitions is ending on 31 July 2020.	Young People Cornwall have been successfully working with 11-25 year olds for almost 40 years, encouraging thousands of young people to reach their potential. We're all about making waves. As a local charity with the skills and insight to support young people who live here, we now deliver a wide range of programmes and projects across Cornwall, as well as providing vital tools and resources to help existing youth groups and clubs to really fly.

The report outlines the collaborative approach we took to testing interactive software as an online engagement method. It sets out the motivation for testing this method and the difficulties we encountered. The lessons we learned from this experiment informs the academic literature on engaging with young people during the Coronovirus Lockdown period.

Surrounding Literature

Due to the introduction of social distancing and school closures during the Coronavirus Lockdown there has been a large increase in online tools. This literature review outlines the development of engaging children and young people as well as current uses of online engagement.

Trends in research with children and young people
According to Coad and Lewis (2004), it is important to consider trends in research and how this can affect the development of current approaches. An example of this is approaches to understanding the views of children and young people (Kirby, 1999; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). 'Participatory research', discussed by Oliver (1997), refers to the nature of relationships between the researcher and their participants and the overall power associated. It is discussed by Minkler (2003) who identifies the many different aspects of the changing of traditional relationships within research.

Ethical considerations
When engaging with young people online it is important that they understand how their data will be recorded. There has been much debate surrounding at what age children can consent and understand fully what participation means without adult supervision or intervention (O'Donnell and Strasburger, 1998). According to Moore *et al* (1998), this can be even more difficult when a child presents with additional needs such as a learning disability (also see Coad and Lewis., 2004). There is the added consideration of the issue of confidentiality and the inability to completely safeguard this (Fox *et al, 2007)*. Pittenger (2003) concludes that the risks associated with online engagement should not be more than face to face work.

Using the internet to engage with young people
According to Fox et al (2007), moving research (such as focus groups) online is in keeping with current advances of technology. It also enables us to engage with others that may not be willing to or able to engage in face to face discussion. According to Gaiser (1997), most online research has taken place through non-current time applications for example notice boards or discussion groups. There are many advantages to online discussion groups, such as not having to consider time differences, or giving space to participants that may be slow to answer. Whether this can actually be classed as a focus group has been questioned (Fox et al, 2007).

According to Finlay (2002), being able to reflect on what you are being asked and the opportunity to discuss this is an integral part of qualitative research. It is noted by Ginsburg and Link (1989) that face to face focus groups can be hard for young people due to issues such as lack of confidence, having to travel and lack of organisational skills. Zimmerman (1987) discusses that the use of using computers to engage young people is not a new concept and has been around for

some time. Successful factors for face to face focus groups have been described as "free of distraction, easy to find and relaxed" (Krueger., 1988) and it is important that this remains with online focus groups too. It has been discussed by Mann and Stewart (2000), that it is really important for online focus groups to be well moderated in order to ensure that participants are not going off topic and are being engaged. Moderation is also needed to ensure that adequate safeguarding is occurring. It is also important that the moderator remains vigilant as it may be harder to see if a participant is upset or struggling with participating (Fox *et al, 2007).*

It has been discussed by Rhodes, Bowie and Hergenrather (2003), that there are some large benefits to moving engagement online due to a reduction of cost and the ability to reach those that might not previously have been able to engage. This helps to increase the depth of the research and therefore is a good method for working with children and young people, especially in circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic. As far as we are aware there is no published research on the use of interactive presentation software as an engagement method.

Scope

The project scope was developed between HeadStart Kernow, Falmouth University and Professor Bhui. The aims of the project were two-fold:

- To provide recommendations from the young people to improve the development of the MH4Life website. These recommendations will inform the development of a young people section on site to increase traffic and improve young people's use of site.
- To test a new online engagement method and discuss the respective challenges and opportunities of methods of engagement for working with young people (given Covid-19 constraints).

The project was developed in May 2020 and completed one month later. In developing the approach HeadStart worked closely with YPC and Ambitions.

Challenges and considerations

YPC and Ambitions support young people individually and in groups. They highlighted two key challenges to engaging young people during the Coronavirus Lockdown on the review of the MH4L website:

Timing: The wellbeing of young people is a priority and we were mindful about young people's capacity and availability for accessing engagement work at this time. Large scale engagement was not appropriate and therefore small numbers of targeted conversations were considered more appropriate.

Danger of over-consultation: Young people are regularly being consulted and have recently informed the review of the 'Mind Your Way' website. We sought to use the learning from the Mind Your Way consultation to form the questions on the review of the Mental Health For Life website. This is so that we are building on what young people have already told us, so reducing duplication and survey-fatigue.

These challenges highlight the importance of working in partnership with organisations to reach young people to engage them in a meaningful way. This is especially true of young people with lived experience of emotional and mental health issues.

Findings from the consultation on the Mind Your Way website

Before the Coronavirus period YPC conducted an extensive face-to-face consultation with young people to inform the development of the Mind Your Way mental health website (https://mindyourway.co.uk/). The main points from the young people are:

Main points from young people are;
- Easy navigation / layout
- Language is clear – no jargon
- Consider SEND and different learning styles

Online engagement methods

The HeadStart team considered different engagement methods for the review of the MH4L website, including:
- Holding online focus groups
- Sending out an online survey
- Using an interactive presenter software

There were advantages and disadvantages to each of these methods as outlined below.

Online focus groups
The advantage of this method is that there is a high level of engagement between the facilitator and the young person. It is a qualitative approach. The disadvantage is that number of participants are limited to very small groups – no more than 4 young people in each focus groups. It requires substantial preparation time (to recruit participants and arrange meetings) and analysis times (each hour typically requires a day of transcribing and analysis).

Sending out an online survey
Surveys are regularly used across the industry to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The main advantage of an online survey is the high number of potential participants. It is relatively low-cost to set up and run.

Interactive presenter software
Interactive presentation software is a survey that enables facilitated engagement. Participants are given a code which allows them to access the survey at the same time as a facilitator or presenter. There are clear advantages of using this as an engagement method:
- Results are easily accessible. The facilitator is able to view and display the question results as they come in, which allows the facilitator to 'dig deeper' on subsequent questions.

- It can be completed independently (like a survey) or in presenter mode by a facilitator.
- The results are analysed in the same way as a traditional survey. Open ended qualitative questions can be displayed as word clouds. Quantitative data can be displayed as charts and tables.

The main perceived disadvantage is that it takes longer to set up and use compared to a standard survey.

Discussion

HeadStart Kernow had previously used the interactive presenter software to good effect during the Coronavirus Lockdown for a 'R U OK' survey of young people (aged 10-16) surrounding their experiences of lockdown and how they have coped. The survey gained 1,178 responses. The interactive presentation software seemed to be a good compromise between the resource-intensive focus-group approach and the impersonal online survey. We were therefore keen to push the limits of this survey by using it for the review of the MH4L website.

At about the same time, on a separate project, HeadStart used a 'co-researcher' approach to engagement with young people. There are benefits to involving young people in a co-researcher way that moves beyond consultation which could be applied to future reviews of mental health websites. This method was not chosen for the review of the MH4L website due to the resource-intensive nature of recruiting and supporting young people to be 'co-researchers', and the tight timeframe.

Development and promotion

The HeadStart Kernow team used the findings of the consultation on the Mind Your Way website to inform the questions on the review of the MH4L website. These were then uploaded onto the interactive presentation software (please see appendix 1). Young people were requested to self-facilitate by opening the MH4L website and completing the survey at the same time. The Start Now branding of Headstart Kernow was used.

The link to the survey on the interactive presentation software was provided to YPC and Ambitions who promoted it directly to their young people. HeadStart also used Social Media to direct young people to the survey.

Promotion Communication

Information to share with young people:

"Many thanks for taking the time to participate in this project. It is one that not only will have a very visible outcome (i.e. improving a web platform for people to use) but also will be informing our future work as we explore adolescent mental health from the ages of 10 – 24 years old. We passionately believe that no young people service should be planned without young people as part of the planning process. There is an opportunity at the end of the survey to input your name, age and email address if you would be interested in taking part in a wider piece around the role of technology."

Findings

Despite intensive promotion, we did not receive a single response to the survey on the interactive presenter software. It is not possible to say how many young people received the link via Social Media or how many tried to complete the survey.

The following difficulties became apparent:
- The level of engagement we were expecting from the young people did not work well with an unfacilitated discussion.
- Young people followed the link to the interactive presenter software on their mobile devices or tablet. This made it very difficult for them to have both the survey and the MH4L website open at the same time.

Going back to our project aims we can conclude:
- Recommendations from young people to improve the development of the MH4Life website could not be gained through use of the interactive presenter software. Application of learning from YPC's consultation on the Mind Your Way website are nonetheless extremely relevant:
  - Easy navigation / layout
  - Language is clear – no jargon
  - Consider SEND and different learning styles
- We tested a new online engagement method and identified a number of challenges. Coronavirus Lockdown conditions were very challenging for the young people to participate in this level of engagement unfacilitated. In other circumstance the use of the interactive presenter software could have worked as it had for our previous 'R U OK' survey.

Key learning

Academics are constantly on the lookout for new engagement methods that can rival more resource intensive approaches. The lack of engagement through the MH4L review (using the interactive presenter software) contrasted with the high level of engagement that the HeadStart team achieved on a separate project by employing a 'co-researcher' approach. Supporting young people to be 'co-researchers' could provide insights into how young people would engage other young people on website design.

The review of the MH4L website required high level of engagement with young people. We have demonstrated that the interactive presenter software will not be replacing more resource intensive methods any time soon.

The challenges of trying to engage online during the Coronavirus Lockdown period highlights the importance of working in partnership with organisations to reach young people to engage them in a meaningful way. This is especially true of young people with lived experience of emotional and mental health issues.

About the authors

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Appendix 1: Interactive Presentation Software

The following screenshots illustrate how the interactive presentation was displayed to young people invited to participate.
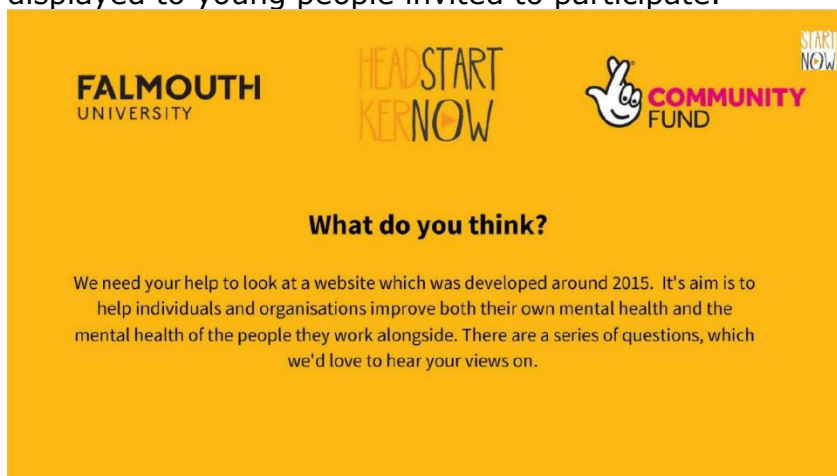
What do you think?

To share your opinions, please visit www.menti.com and use the code 21 27 14

Can you name any websites you would go to, or are aware of, that support childrens and young people's Mental Health and wellbeing?

Now imagine there are no websites to help YP understand MH / find support apart from one.

Strongly disagree	It is easy to explore different parts of the website	Strongly agree
	The website has useful information that helps me	
	The colours and images on this website are engaging	
	I would share this website with a friend	
	I would use this website again	

What words would you use to describe this website?

START NOW

0
👤

What do you want from a website looking to support young people's wellbeing and mental health?

START NOW

Easy to find	Has interesting information	Has information which is easy to understand	Is bright, colourful and engaging	Has information in different formats e.g. videos blogs, text, posters	Shows young people in the content	Easy to navigate around the website	Has practical things for me to do	Signposts me to support in my local area
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

0
👤

Is there anything else you would want from a website?

START NOW

0
👤

9

The website owners want to make this website more engaging to young people. What changes to this website would you recommend?

START NOW

START NOW

Thank you for your time.

If you require support or further information around health and wellbeing, please contact www.Your-Way.org.uk

START NOW

If you would like to be involved in the piece of research around this, please enter your contact details below.

First name
Age
Email address

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