‘What is it about?’
Illustrating research
a collaboration to narratively disseminate research findings

Karen Gray (University of Worcester)
Emma Lazenby (ForMed Films)

British Psychological Society Seminar Series
8th July 2019, University of the West of England
We make animated films and illustrations to help people to better understand medical and health issues.
What is it about ARTS and DEMENTIA that makes it so hard to EVALUATE?
Gradually, as scientists from all disciplines explored these sorts of unpredictable phenomena, a new theory emerged called **Complexity Theory**. This approach helps distinguish simple, ordered and mechanical systems from complex systems.

**The simple organised system of a doughnut factory**

- Mix
  - The system is the sum of its parts
  - Static and rigid
  - Can be understood by reducing the system to smaller parts

- Dough extrude
- Fry
- Glaze
- Package
- Has right answers and solutions
- Has complete information
- Predictable and repeatable

**The complex adaptive system of obesity in the UK**

- The system can't be understood by reducing it to smaller parts, it must be viewed holistically
- No definitive fix or solution
- Dynamic and constantly adapting
- The whole is more than the sum of its parts
- Must interact with the system to understand it because cause and effect relationships are unclear
I think projects have lots and lots of different conceptions of value. I think it’s when they enter into the domain of kind of – health and social care – and, you know, general sort of funding. It’s where you then start to get the values of different organisations all trying to come together. So you’ll have projects that are using lots of different evaluation frameworks because they’ve got lots of different funders, and it doesn’t necessarily lend itself to a coherent evaluation approach and if they insist on… they’d have to be quite, you know, well established organisations to be able to insist on their own evaluation framework. But I think often funders impose these things and it kind of can… it can be quite destabilizing for organisations, because it can change as well. So it means that the data that they’ve been collecting over a number of years could be quite different.

**Interviewer**

Change because of particular funders…?

**INT_028_EVA_180221**

Might want from one year to the next. So, they’re not necessarily building up a consistent picture. And data…

**Interviewer**

Are you thinking of any particular kind of funder in that instance?

**INT_028_EVA_180221**

I think that just a lot of the charities that I work with have received funding from lots of different sources have lots of small pots of funding that they depend on and each of those funders has got its own value framework and demands. And they want feedback on different aspects of what they’re delivering. And think that’s just very destabilizing. So it almost makes you think there should be just a standard evaluati framework. But, then that wouldn’t fit because they’re all trying to do different things, and they’ve got…
We're trying to move towards circumstances that would allow those artists and arts organisations to be able to do the work. [012_FUN]

I think as an artist, it's our job to broaden the expectations about what could be achieved [009_PRA]

I think I use an awful lot of skills that aren't necessarily recognized in the big wide world for this work. [...] measuring atmosphere, measuring mood, measuring... measuring how engaged somebody is.

But then we've got our cynical Medical Director who's always saying 'what's the evidence for this?' and I always think that, well, how am I going to address what he wants to hear? [027_COM]

I think it's really crucial that arts organisations need to do in-depth research and evaluation of the work that we're doing because all of those outcomes are sort of going to be lost otherwise.

I get asked to do evaluations and I think sometimes what people want is a kind of stamp of authority on their project. And I would prefer to do evaluations that are more collaborative [028_EVA]

I think if you undertake an evaluation you need to accept that, that it's an evaluation and not a research project. (003_EVA)

Evaluation is a business really in lots of ways... (003_EVA)

I think if you're thinking you're going to get some tidy little nice thing out of this, some charts, you're going to really disappointed very fast. (004_EVA)
What worked/How to move forwards

ASK ENOUGH QUESTIONS

You can’t just evaluate for the sake of it. [011_PM]

I think people rarely ask enough questions at the beginning when they’re planning an evaluation. [032_EVA]

I think an organisation has to decide why it wants to do the evaluation, what purpose is it for? [011_PM]

It’s fine if you’re self-funded, you can be as mystical as you like. But if you’re relying on any kind of public funding, there can be no mystique. You have to say what you’re doing and why it’s worth funding. [028_EVA]

I’ve spent 25 years trying to figure out what is the practitioner trying to achieve and, and… helping them figure out what they’re trying to achieve so that we could then measure whether they’ve met it or not. [034_EVA]

So, evaluation has now become something that we think about at the very beginning of projects and we’ve tried to embed it from the very beginning [017_PM]
Funder
unfortunately I do have to sell it from a financial point of view because that's how CCGs work.

Artist
Our aim is for a person with dementia to have an experience of themselves as creative, as connected.

Evaluator
You're sort of a tool basically

It is crucial that arts organisations do in depth research and evaluation of the work that we're doing because all of those outcomes are going to be lost.

it's our job to broaden the expectations about what could be achieved

What is the intervention? What does it comprise? When is the change that we are looking for to be measured?
The woman who had asked me to do this session, came over and said ‘the rest of them really enjoyed it, but I don’t really think it’s worth Jack coming next time.’

Now, Jack had sat motionless during that session with a straight face, but as I collected the ribbons in...

...he looked at me with his shiny eyes saying...

TAKES YOU BACK! Now, that man had got a huge amount out of it, but if I’d been using ribbon waggling as an indicator of engagement, he wouldn’t have been brought next week.
The EVALUATOR’S problem

There’s always this desire with dementia, because it’s one of those incurables, is this going to fix it? Is it going to make their cognition better? There’s a desire to have a long-term change and impact.

Having a good time this morning is one thing but does that impact people’s behaviour longer term? Particularly people with dementia, is that the right question to be asking? because the here and now is so important. If we can make the here and now really enjoyable and exciting and colourful, is that enough?
I'm looking for outcomes like:

- Increased interaction
- Increased wellbeing
- Feeling good
- Enhanced mood
- Ability to communicate
- Reduced anxiety

But also, the other side of it is to integrate it into the practice of the home.

Getting the information that is coming from the staff, the artists, the relatives, the good information, and the reports, into care plans.

It's the awareness raising bit.
I end up talking in stories
I have been very interested in trying to explain what happened in terms that would be useful to people wanting to set up similar work.
It was an absolute joy, one of the best research initiatives, absolutely food for the soul!