

PSYCHIC FISH

@ Pi: the problem with plastic



MANCHESTER
SCIENCE FESTIVAL
Oct 2019





Activities

- Psychic fish
- Plotting care v capacity
- Fishy thoughts

Number of people engaged - 250 approx

Participants were diverse in ages, ethnicity and physical abilities.



Psychic fish

Initial activity was to see how people feel about fish. The psychic fish “reveals” how a participant really feels. The conversation is opened up by asking if the result is true.

This approach worked well as the surprise/joy of the psychic fish lowered barriers to conversations and people were again surprised but curious that focus of the research was about the sites and species connected to animal research.

The psychic fish had been piloted previously but this was the first time they had been used with family groups and younger participants.

The psychic fish proved very popular with all ages and people arrived at the table requesting to do the activity. Many participants asked to take them home so their friends could see.





Moving head	You KNOW fish
Moving tail	Alive but do not feel
Moving head & tail	Delicious!
Curling sides	Feels pleasure but not pain
Turns over	Undecided
Motionless	You feel nothing, they feel nothing
Curled up entirely	Fully sentient beings

Plotting care

People plotted how much they cared about fish against how much they thought fish could feel.

The concept of plotting a point on a graph was beyond a lot of the younger participants, however, they added crosses to the X and Y axis to represent their feelings.

This was not designed to be quantitative but to facilitate a conversation around somatic empathy, if you need to care *about* something to care *for* it, and what implication these have on welfare and caring within the laboratory.

In this respect the activity worked well even with younger children and lead to us developing a good narrative questioning style to explain sentience and capacity.

The unexpected joy of this was how much discussion is produced in family groups. Often people would be shocked at someone else's feelings. This proved that we created an activity that supported people answering truthfully and not how they thought they should.

Fishy thoughts

Participants were invited to leave any fish related thoughts they had by filling in a thought bubble and adding it to the sticky wall.

The majority of the responses came from younger children, with some preferring to draw a fish. However, this created time for older participants/parents and guardians to discuss the research further and allowed even the youngest participant to feel able to contribute.





How
can we best
show fish
exhibiting we
can identify
with?

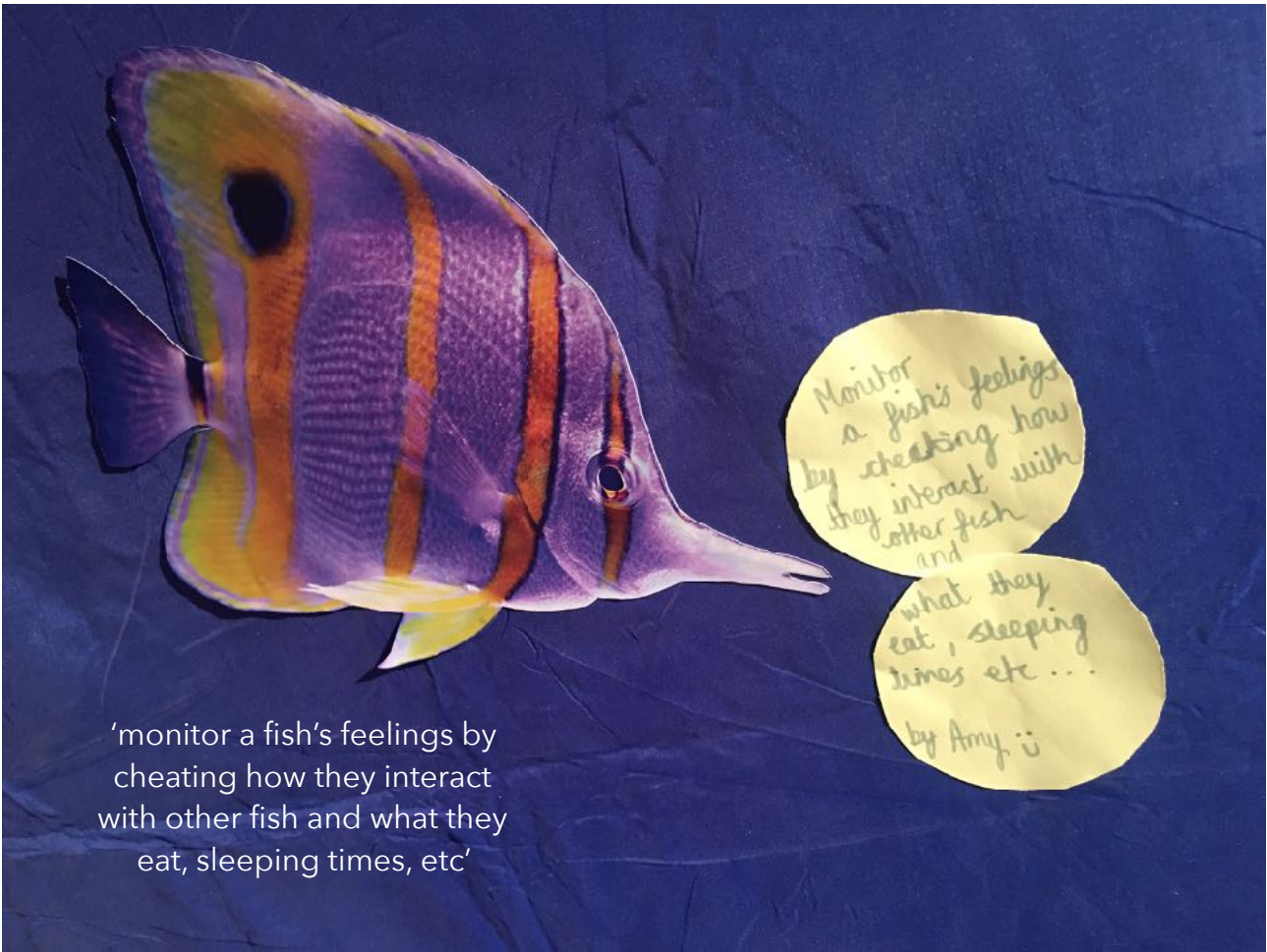
'how can we best show fish
exhibiting emotions we can
identify with?'



'I like animals but not
fish'

I like
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fish.





Monitor
a fish's feelings
by checking how
they interact with
other fish
and

what they
eat, sleeping
times etc ...
by Amy :)

'monitor a fish's feelings by
checking how they interact
with other fish and what they
eat, sleeping times, etc'



I did not
know that fish
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experiments but
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interesting :)

'I did not know that fish
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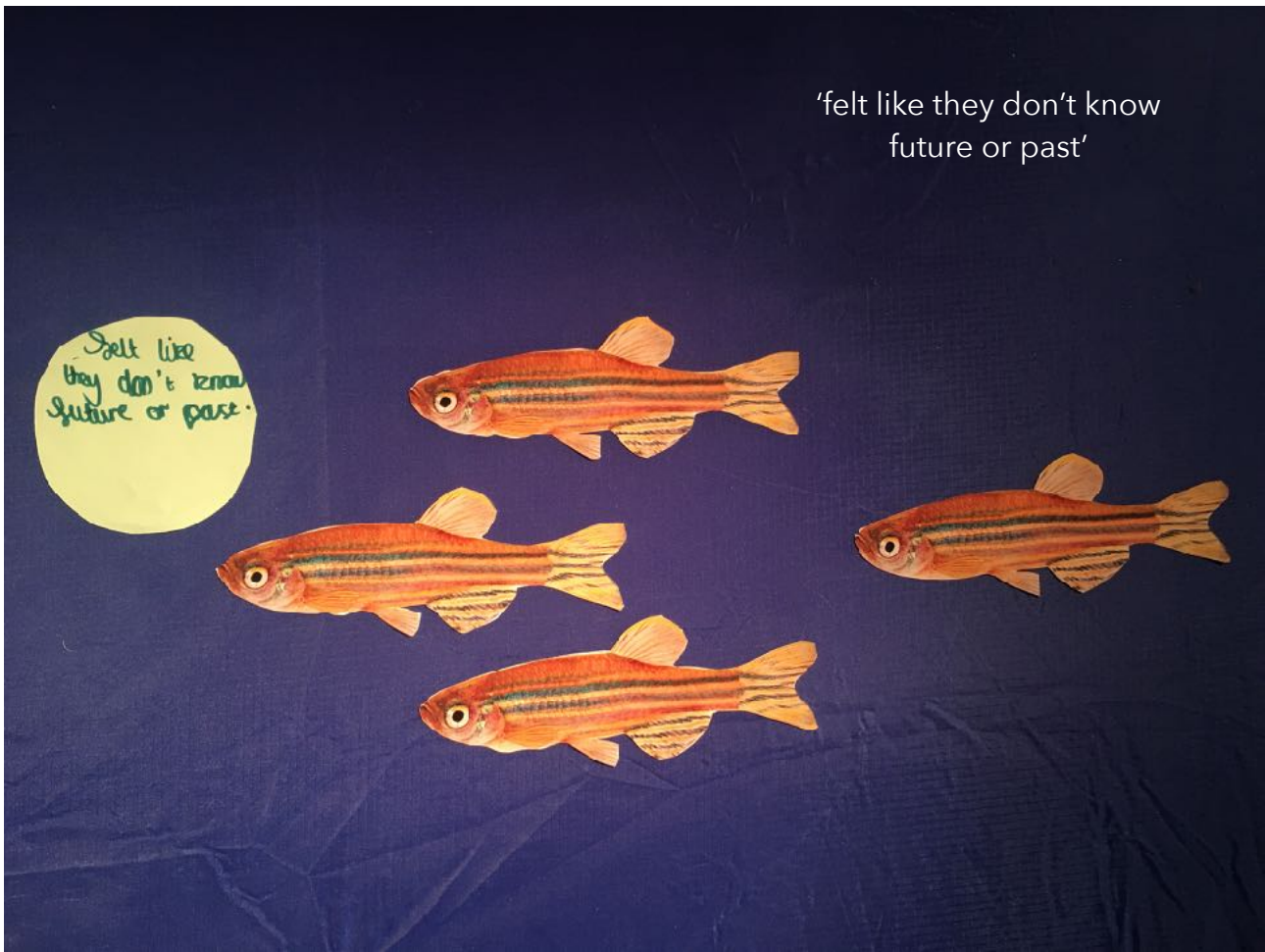
Fish are amazing creatures and they deserve to be treated well 🐟

'fish are amazing creatures and they deserve to be treated well'



not delicious but great to look at

'not delicious but great to look at'



A lot of comments were concerning plastic contamination of the ocean and aquatic environments. The theme of the day was "The Problem With Plastics" and all the other activities related directly to plastic so this was anticipated.

There was still a range of range of responses from a diverse set of respondents.

Reflections

We wanted to design and pilot a suite of activities to act as an invisible hook with which to catch people's imagination and gently guide their thinking from the open ocean, the lake, the plate, to the lab.

The framework needed to be loose enough to feel driven by curiosity and discovery while also establishing a sense of reciprocity. The participants explore their own feelings and then challenge themselves by asking more questions about our research and approach.

The depth and breadth of the conversations also demonstrated that the activity and underlying framework are pitched at the right level to allow meandering but productive conversations. It is fundamental to our approach and practice that we uncover people's nuanced views and evolve the discourse away from polarised debates.

It was valuable to test these in a family friendly setting. While children are not our target audience it is important to acknowledge that future engagement locations (museums, festivals, open days) will likely attract families. Therefore, it is good to know these can be adapted or used in such a way as to engage each person in the family, regardless of their ages, and not merely act as a distraction.

Another important finding was the willingness of people to discuss animal research. There was nothing in the activity blurb or initial invitation that mentioned animal research. However, none of the participants demonstrated, voiced, or fed back any discomfort in accepting a playful invitation which led to deep and serious conversations about animal research.

In fact, animal research was discussed with younger children too. There was no intervention from parents or guardians to these discussions which suggests they were happy for this topic to be discussed openly.

Conclusions

The original aim was to explore people's perceptions around fish use, sentence and how these shape and define assumptions around species welfare requirements.

It was important to create a space free from judgement or authority where participants were free to choose their level of engagement, to share personal beliefs and confront difficult issues and to leave feeling respected and stimulated.

The conversations sparked by the psychic fish were diverse but included topics that interlink with identity politics and personal ethics and morality. Since these arose here and were openly shared we can view this as a very successful pilot.

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The University of Manchester

