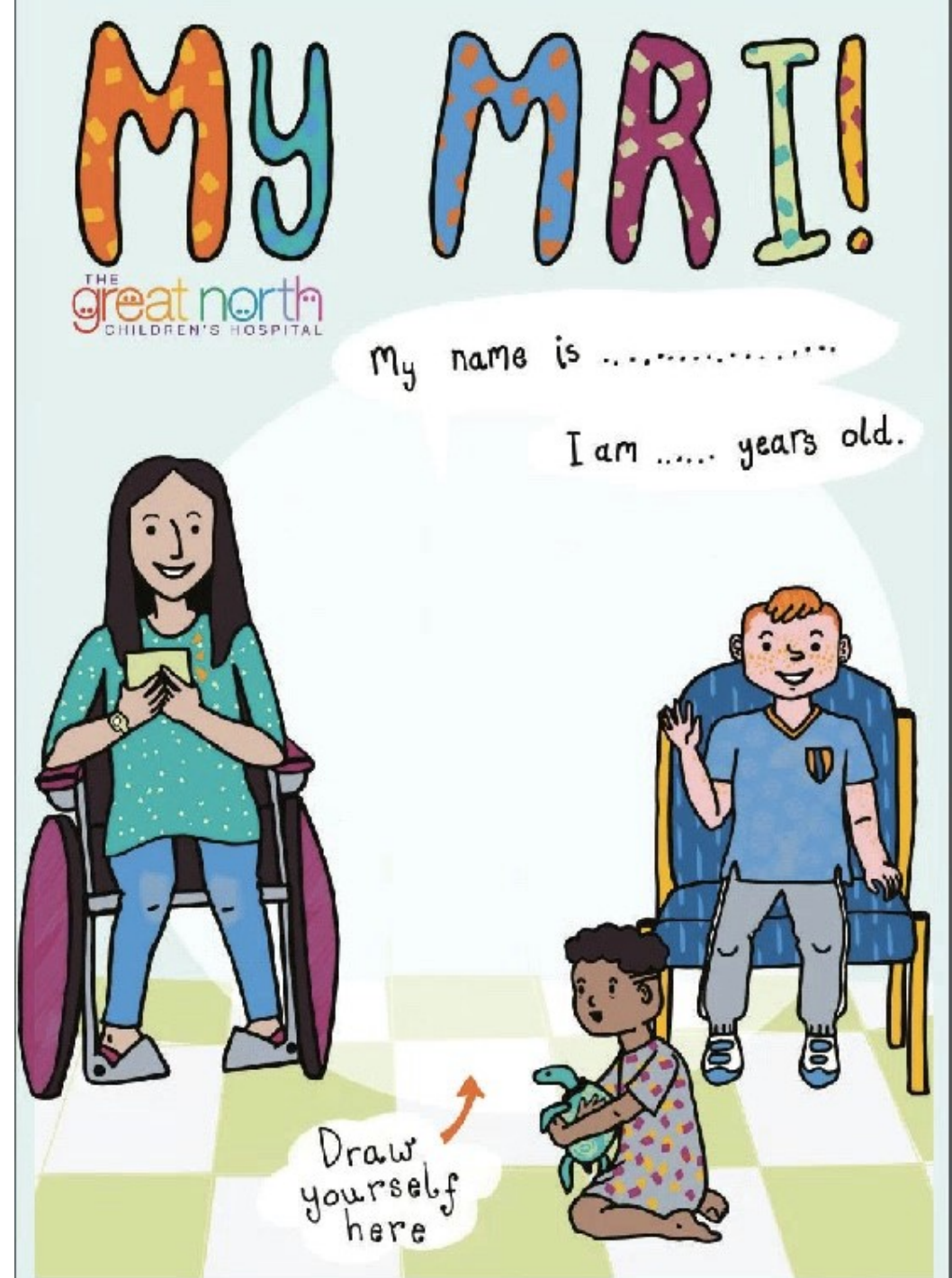


The role of Comic Format Information Sheets in Explaining Medical Procedures to Children: Drawing the MRI Scan

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CHECK LIST

Empty pockets? ☐

No jewellery? ☐

Been to
the toilet? ☐

Introduction

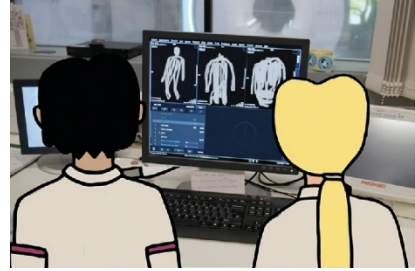
- Background to the project
- The team
- The processes involved in making the comic
- The channelling of the story of an MRI into 3 characters/stories and what they capture
- What the comic format and style enables in capturing the social and material process of having an MRI scan
- Closing reflections and what next

Background to the project

- There is broad recognition that children have a right to participate in decisions about their health and treatments.
- Part of this involves providing information to them in formats that are accessible and interesting.
- One approach to doing so is to use creative formats that make use of visual and literary representation.
- Radiography at the Great North Children's Hospital had a concern that their information for children receiving an MRI scan was not appropriate and too focused on the technology, rather than the process of having a scan.
- There were also problems with children's 'compliance' with the MRI procedure, but they framed the issue as a problem with the process rather than with the children.
- Researchers at Newcastle University who work across different fields in social sciences and creative arts were contacted to see if we could help.



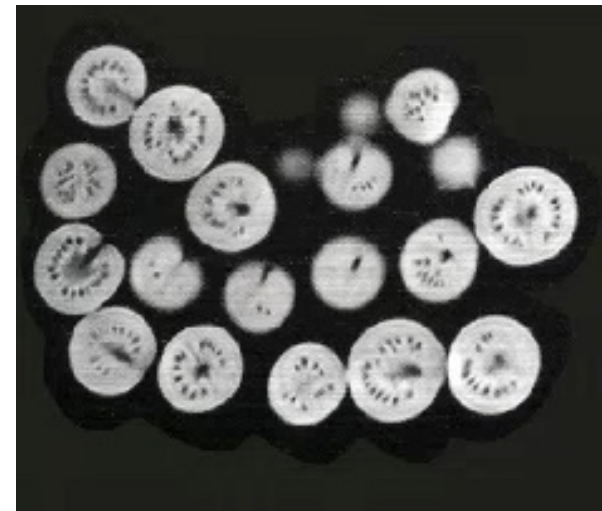
The team



- The process of exploring this collaboration between different researchers, the radiography team, other hospital actors, and a comic designer took time.
- Early discussions were quite broad about who would be involved and what we would be doing – part of the social contexts influencing this was resources, both time and money.
- Eventually the team became:
 - Claire Watson – Radiographer, Great North Children’s Hospital
 - Julie Anderson – Research and Innovations Manager, Great North Children’s Hospital
 - Lydia Wysocki – Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University; Applied Comics Etc
 - Janice McLaughlin – Sociology, Newcastle University
 - Heather Wilson – Comic Developer, HeatherWilson Illustrations
- There was a notable range of perspective and expertise and institutional position within the group – all of which has informed the practical and conceptual input into the design process.

The processes involved in making the comic

- Early discussions were very loose around possible materials that could be developed, with a lot of discussion about suitability to different age ranges, existing creative materials used for children, electronic possibilities, as well as sociology of childhood.
- The comic format seemed a possible way of capturing the story of the MRI, while possibly appealing to different age groups.
- The MRI itself is a visual process and the radiographers had already developed visual materials that they used with children to show what the MRI does.
- Before going further in developing a comic we took existing materials to the hospital's Young Person's Advisory Group to gain their feedback.



YPAG

- Young People's Advisory Group (existing structure for consultation with young people)
- Feedback on text-based patient information leaflets, apps and websites, and words/pictures patient information
- Constructive and critical comments
- Key points: don't make it look like school documents and exam papers; not too childish; enough space to write on; stories are useful; different styles for different age groups
- More positive about 'words and pictures' examples than 'words only' and 'pictures only' examples, though by no means unanimously keen on comics – preconceptions of the **style and tone** of comics they had seen before impeded deeper exploration of what the comics **medium** can offer
- The young people played an important consultative role **within** research process, one not without **limitation**.

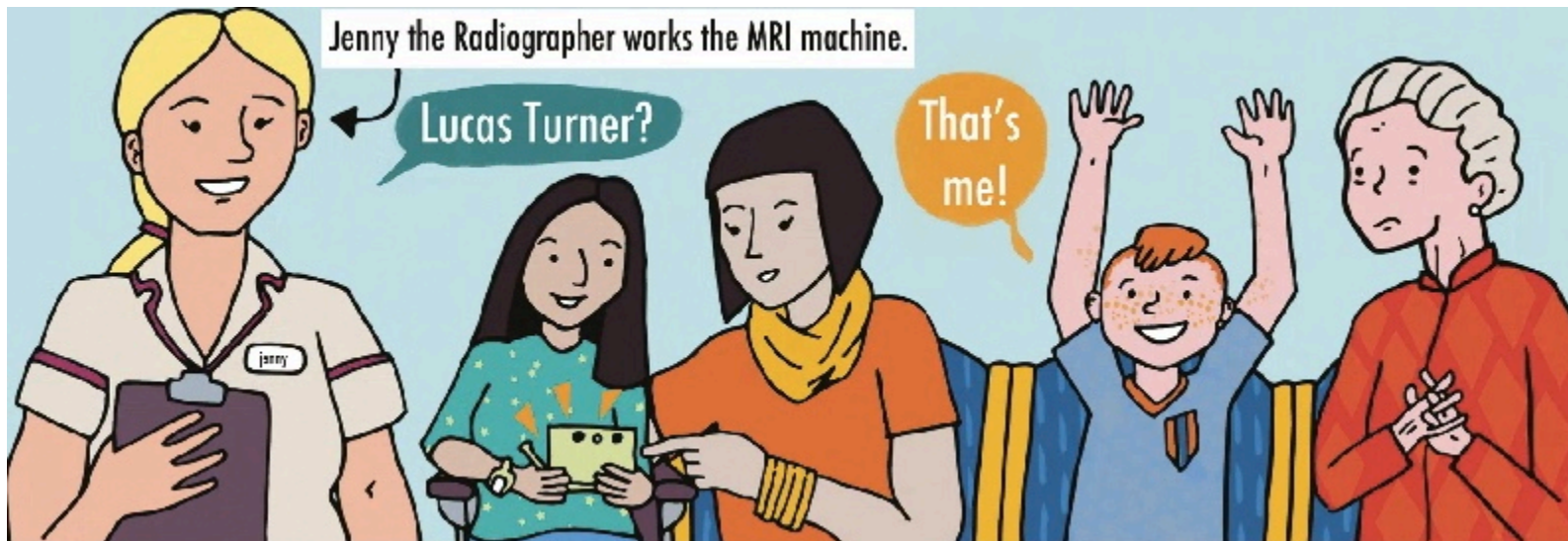


'Project roadmap' poster presented at YPAG conference December 2016 (<http://www.appliedcomicsetc.com/wp-content/uploads/YPAGPoster.pdf>)



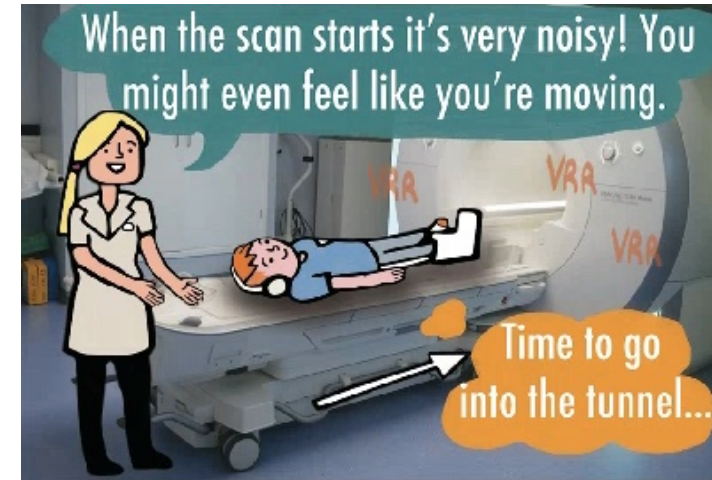
The processes involved in making the comic

- We gained a small pot of funding from Sociology's Impact Funding - key factor in enabling us to move forward and creating a stable feel to the team and the endeavour.
- Enabled us to fund a comic designer and pay for them to come visit (after significant university bureaucracy over payment)
- Key next step was a site visit to the MRI scanner, which helped all of us, particularly the comic designer, to understand the dynamics involved in having a scan.



The processes involved in making the comic

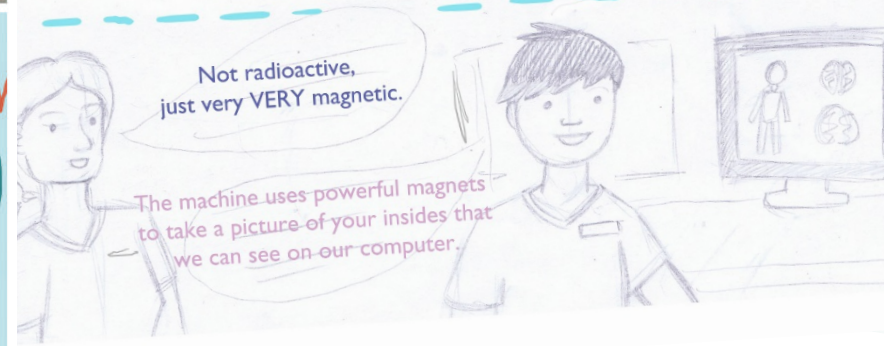
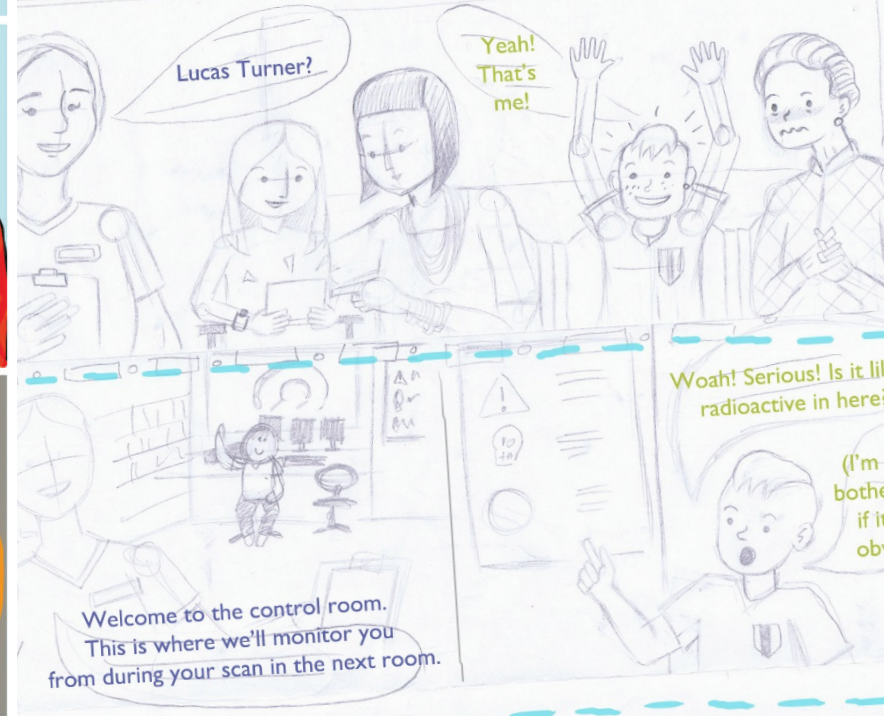
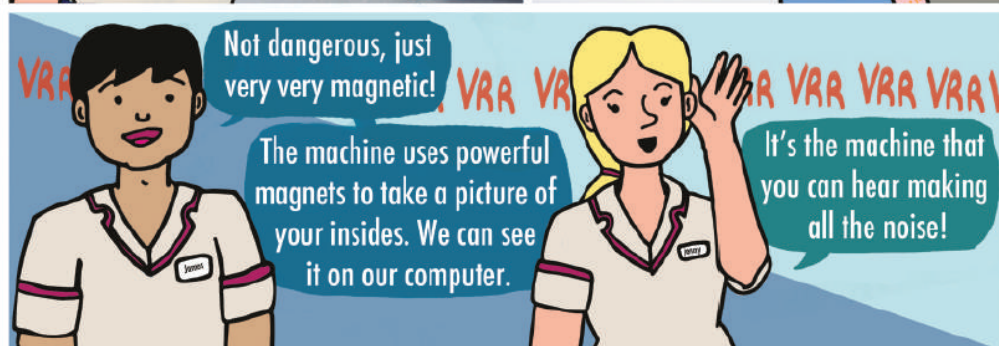
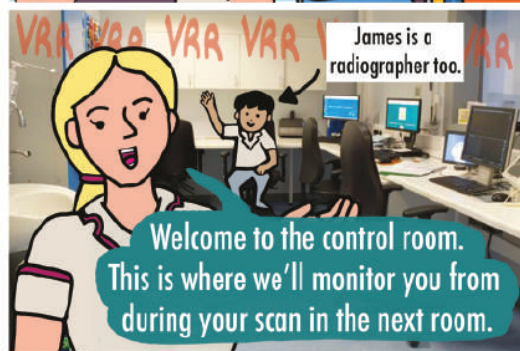
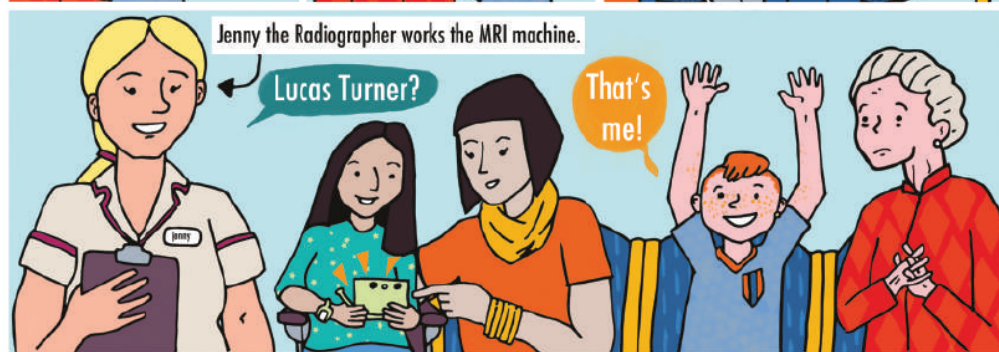
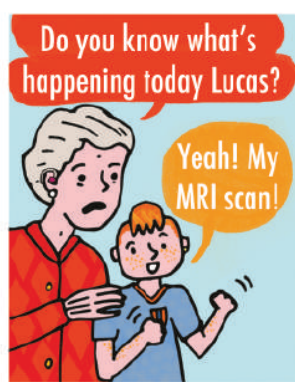
- The visit highlighted key things for us
 - The multiple warning signs that capture danger
 - The size of the machine and the significant noises it makes
 - The stages of moving through different rooms and removing different pieces of clothing, personal belongings and medical equipment
 - The different bits of kit associated with the MRI, and using that kit correctly
 - The feel of the MRI room itself
 - The different medical personnel involved.
- What this indicated was the complex social and material processes involved in the scan and the variety of scanning experience a child could experience. How could the comic capture that?



The channelling of the story of an MRI into 3 characters/stories

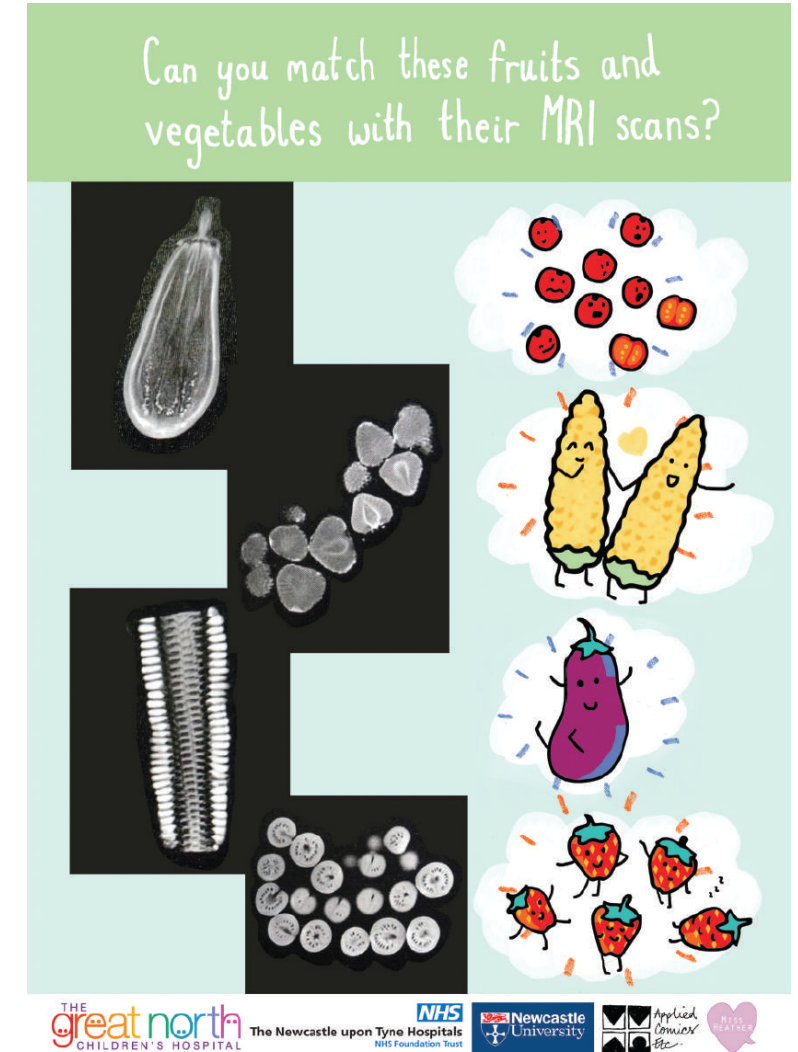
- While on the site visit we fleshed out the idea of 3 different pathways/contexts a child could go through as part of receiving an MRI that would make important differences in their experience:
 - A child with a minor problem being seen as an outpatient
 - A disabled child who was also an outpatient, but would need to have their assistive technology replaced in order to have a scan.
 - A child who is an inpatient and more seriously ill.
- Within these 3 stories we also wanted to capture variation in some of the social contexts of the child:
 - Travelling from further away (as the hospital has a large catchment area)
 - Variation in adult carer who could be with the child
 - Variation in the social and ethnic background of the child
 - Different emotional responses children and adult carers can have (excitement, fear, boredom, frustration etc.)





What the comics medium captures of the social and material dynamic of having an MRI scan

- The **layering** of photographic imagery from the actual space and scanner, with the drawn elements and the story format of the comic design, enables both a social and material story to be told.
- The **3 stories** woven through the 3 characters in a brief and visually recognisable way capture a variety of experience and background that text on its own cannot provide with the same immediacy and ability to flick through.
- The comics are multimodal through use of interdependent words and pictures. Some meaning is made available through images alone, and more meaning in conjunction with the contextualised speech/words.



What the comics medium captures of the social and material dynamic of having an MRI scan

- The **mix of real contexts and fictionalised characters** balances the aim of preparing children for a real experience with the need to show a range of possible experiences and family/carer scenarios
- Input from the radiography team as **shared ownership** of the project, for example reusing scans of fruit and veg as a matching activity.



...how do you do all that, then?

Importance of:

- building an **interdisciplinary team**, and **setting boundaries** within that team: don't expect the comics creator to know about medical kit, don't expect the radiographer to know how to write and draw narrative.
- **brokering these relationships**: building on previous science/healthcare + creative arts practice projects, but this was a new team.
- working with **experienced comics creators** as part of that interdisciplinary team: not about directly illustrating what the radiographers wanted, but developing something that was a readable comic (story is told in words and in pictures).
- focusing on end 'product' to be read by children in specific clinical settings: this project is an example of **applied creative practice**, comics with a purpose.
- for more of this sort of thing, see www.AppliedComicsEtc.com (and more broadly, <https://www.graphicmedicine.org/>)

Concluding reflections and what next

- It has been an experimental process of bringing very different perspectives and interests together:
 - Practical needs of the radiography unit
 - The research ambitions of the hospital
 - The academic impact agendas of the researchers
 - The perspectives of the YPAG group as a partial sounding board
 - The different research background of the team
 - The challenges of freelance comic design and contract research
- That mix of skill and interest worked in this project positively in a context of trust and learning
- The social and material processes of making the comic, translate into the social and material processes embedded in having an MRI scan, into next children using the comic awaiting the MRI scan.

Concluding reflections and what next

- A particularly challenge when working on these small scale collaborations is the institutional issues of funding, bureaucracy, NHS staff availability, different time frames and other contingencies.
- Lots of work is done 'in kind' and not always supported by the varied institutions.
- Currently waiting to hear about funding to evaluate the comic with children and young people, with ethics and research sponsorships underway as we speak...
- Plans for dissemination of the comic in print and online need to be agreed by all partners.

Which of these **DOESN'T**
belong in the **MRI** room?
Plastic Metal Paper

