



Inner and Outer Voices in Research: How Dialogical Approaches Can Enhance Knowledge Development in Mental Healthcare

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This article contributes methodological reflections on how dialogical and reflective approaches can enhance many voices in research. An epistemological assumption in research with a participatory design is that knowledge can be developed by collaborative processes between researchers and individuals with lived experiences. The study was conducted by arranging a reflective process meeting with different participants: researchers and mental health service providers and users. Using reflective thematic analysis and an analytical perspective, it describes the reflective process as the *tailoring of different voices*, which is a way of facilitating research that enables different participants to contribute their experiences in a dialogical process. The findings show that reflective processes can encourage people to both listen and talk and, in that sense, have both inner and outer dialogues that endorse the use of different types of knowledge, including research and lived experiences, to create new understandings together. This can have an impact on both collaborative research and practice in mental health services.

Keywords: dialogue, reflective process, mental health, co-creation of knowledge, youth, open dialogue

Key Points

1. This article contributes methodological reflections on how dialogical and reflective approaches can enhance many voices in research.
2. The underlying assumption of this study is the incomplete nature of knowledge and the perception that different people have different voices when participating in dialogues.
3. This article offers an insight into the authors' perceptions of how researchers and participants can come together to dialogue and co-create knowledge.
4. A reflective process could be a setting that encourages people to both listen and talk and, in that sense, have both inner and outer dialogues that might endorse the use of different types of knowledge, including research and lived experiences, to create new understandings together.
5. A finding from this study concerns how a reflective process is conducted in a way of facilitating research that enables different participants to contribute their experiences in a dialogical process.

This article explores how different voices and experiences can be enabled in knowledge development using dialogical and reflective research methods. An ontological assumption is that knowledge is created in contexts rather than being out there, not yet found (McNamee, 2010). The study is ontologically placed in a social constructionist and post-structural tradition, in which the social world, including knowledge, social relations, and practices, is perceived as a discourse created through processes of communication (Phillips, 2011). An epistemological assumption in research with a collaborative design underlies a belief that knowledge can be developed by

collaborative processes between researchers and individuals with lived experiences (Borg, Karlsson, Kim, & McCormack, 2012; Desai et al., 2019; Kidd, Davidson, Frederick, & Kral, 2018). Sullivan (2012) argues that dialogue is its own epistemology, as knowledge comes from personal participation in dialogue with the ideas of others.

In the present study, the authors co-created a research methodology based on dialogical approaches. We aimed to involve many voices in research to explore how dialogue as a research method could enhance the co-creation of knowledge. In contrast to having an outside 'expert' study as an object, people with different experiences were given space to learn and create knowledge together. In this way, we study epistemology in itself; what we believe knowledge is, how it is created, and how it is developed.

This study is situated in a collaborative research tradition within the mental health field with roots back to the United States of the 1970s (Borg et al., 2012; Davidson, Ridgway, Schmutte, & O'Connell, 2009; Rose, 2009; Veseth, Binder, Borg, & Davidson, 2017). The notion of co-production of knowledge for the mental health field grew as a critique of authority, experts, and public services. These collaborative research methods and collaboration on service development have links to the civil rights movement and social action (Clark, 2015; Ness & Heimborg, 2020). In this study we use the notion of co-creation of knowledge (McNamee, 2010). The difference between co-creation and co-production seems to be the level of collaboration over a period. Co-creation represents collaboration on something new, such as a service or new knowledge, while co-production involves the whole collaborative process and is often used about an entire research collaboration from start to end. Oliver et al. (2004) developed a framework for examining the diverse ways of involving consumers in research: consultation, collaboration, or consumer control. They discuss the need for research on working with consumers using an ethos of reflexive research and collective decision-making that addresses the processes and outcomes of consensus development.

The present study uses collaboration to study the processes involved in how to develop knowledge together and how tensions in dialogues impact research. It was inspired by two mental healthcare approaches: 'open dialogue' and 'reflective processes' (Andersen, 1991, 1995; Seikkula, 2011). The shift between the positions of listening and dialogue, as understood from these perspectives, forms the foundation of its methodology. The philosopher Bakhtin (1984, p. 293) claims: 'To live means to participate in dialogue.' This is not just a social action between different actors but an ongoing process of dialogues, of peoples' inner conversations between voices, the polyphonic self-voice (Bakhtin, 1984; Seikkula, 2008). To participate in dialogue is to recognise one's own incompleteness. This means that we learn about our self and our life both through other people's experiences and by experiencing the dialogue in and of itself. Differences in age, life experiences, gender, education, and roles can enhance the possibility of understanding something known in new ways.

According to Baxter (2006), Bakhtin has a holistic perspective on language, expression, and meaning, which involves traces of previous and future dialogues. Expression in dialogues can build on both inner and outer voices, and these voices shape discourses. Voices can build on perspectives, ideologies, and discourses and are not just connected to one individual but many (Bakhtin, 1981; Phillips & Napan, 2016). To keep a critical, reflective focus on the tensions in the dialogue can contribute to our understanding of how knowledge can be developed in a setting with service users, service providers, and researchers present (Phillips, 2011).

In a dialogical understanding of knowledge, communication is constituted in dialogue, in which the participants create knowledge together, bringing together different experiences (Olesen Phillips & Johansen, 2018). We find the perspectives of Seikkula and Andersen to be especially suited to explore how the facilitation of research settings can create spaces for many voices simultaneously – a polyphony of voices (Andersen, 1991, 1995; Seikkula, 2011). Our view seeks to address the critique by Berner-Rodoreda et al. (2020) of the traditional research interview, such as a focus group discussion (FGD), where the role of the researcher is often similar to that of an interviewer who holds the power and decides the focus of the interview by asking questions and navigating the interview guide. In this study dialogue in itself was an aim and the roles of the participants were collaborative.

This article aims to contribute methodological reflections on how dialogical and reflective approaches can enhance many voices in research. To explore and describe these issues, we created the following research question: *How can the use of dialogical and reflective approaches enable different voices and experiences in research?*

Method

Study context and participants

This study was conducted in a rural area in Norway in an outreach mental health team working with young people aged between 13 and 23 years and their families. The team is a local community-based social and mental health service supporting youth in activities related to school or work, providing training in social skills, and coordinating different social services. The team members come from a variety of educational backgrounds in the fields of social work, health care, and education.

The study forms part of the first author's PhD, which has a collaborative research design and consists of three sub-studies. Sub-study 1 focuses on dialogical workshops with the service providers of the outreach mental health team focusing on their perspectives of mental health services for young people (Soggiu, Klevan, Davidson, & Karlsson, 2019). Sub-study 2 consists of interviews with young service users and their relatives with the focus on collaboration around services in recovery processes (Soggiu, Klevan, Davidson, & Karlsson, 2020). The present article is Sub-study 3, which has a focus on dialogical research methods in collaborative research.

For the research project, an expert team consisting of two young service users, two parents, two service providers, and the first author was established to provide experience-based knowledge throughout. The group was involved in various tasks such as developing thematic interview guides for interviews, engaging in dialogues about the themes and the focus of the project, and participating in analysing the data. In Sub-study 2, the expert team and the first author had conducted preliminary thematic analyses of data from interviews with five young service users and five parents focusing on what they had discussed in the interviews (Soggiu et al., 2020). Findings from the preliminary analysis were presented to the participants, in a reflective process. The first author wrote a research diary throughout the research project, which included notes from preparations for and implementation of the reflective process with the expert team. The dialogues from the reflective process and notes from the researcher's diary constitute the data analysed for Sub-study 3 in this research project.

Reflective process meeting

The present study was conducted by arranging a reflective process meeting with different participants: five members of a mental health outreach team, two co-researchers (service users) from the expert group, and three of the authors (A-SS, BK, and TK). The meeting was inspired by therapeutic methods such as open dialogue and reflective processes (Andersen, 1991, 1995; Seikkula & Arnkil, 2013). A reflective team process enhances shifts between listening and talking in a therapeutic setting. All the participants were in the same room, and all the spoken dialogues were shared in space and time in that room. This is a concrete way of inviting all voices to be expressed and heard (Andersen, 1991, 1995). The process was conducted in a collaborative manner that focused on the relationships between the participants in the dialogical context (Ness et al., 2014; Ulland, Andersen, Larsen, & Seikkula, 2014). The underlying assumption of this process was the incomplete nature of knowledge and the recognition that different participants use different sorts of knowledge. Thus, new understandings could be created by including theoretical knowledge and lived experiences, both from professional training and from life in general (Frank, 2005).

In the reflective process, the first author and the co-researchers (service users) from the expert team started out by presenting preliminary findings from the analysis in Sub-study 2. The outreach team joined the dialogue about their practices as service providers. Two of the co-authors (TK & BK) facilitated the reflective process and were responsible for creating a setting in which every voice was given a chance to be heard. The researchers and the members of the outreach team sat as groups opposite each other in the room. The facilitators were at the side between the two groups. The facilitators guided the process through different phases to enable shifts between listening and dialoguing. The phases were: 1) dialogues between the researchers; 2) dialogues between the researchers and the facilitators; 3) dialogues between the members of the outreach team; 4) dialogues between the members of the outreach team and the facilitators; and 5) dialogues amongst all of the participants in the reflective process meeting. The facilitators had the responsibility of making sure that each phase of the process was conducted within the allotted time, that everybody was invited to speak, and that all the phases of the reflective process were completed. The reflective process was recorded and transcribed using two-and-a-half hours of the recorded dialogue word for word.

Research ethics

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD, No. 52349) approved the study. Written informed consent was required before participation, and the data were made anonymous.

Analytic process

We chose to use reflective thematic analysis as an analytical tool that can be applied to data across various theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, Braun, Terry, & Hayfield, 2019; Hansen et al., 2019). At the epistemological level, we used dialogical and discursive perspectives to explore and develop the research methods and the content of the data. Inspired by Phillips (2011), we also focused on the diversities of interest in dialogical processes of knowledge development by using an analytical perspective that was conducive to knowledge about tensions in

a specific practice where different forms of knowledge meet. The process of analysis followed and explored two paths: the research method and the content of the empirical data.

The data analysis was conducted solely by the authors through dialogically exploring and co-creating findings and knowledge together. Three of the authors had taken part in the reflective process, and, in that sense, had experienced being part of the data analysed. Different experiences from the reflective and research process influenced the dialogues and the co-creation of knowledge, both in oral dialogues and in writing. The first author read through and categorised all the data and prepared preliminary suggestions of findings which were presented to the other four researchers who then engaged in dialogues about how to understand the emerging findings both in meetings and by email. In that way, the dialogue and co-creation of knowledge continued during the analysis phases.

The data were analysed in two phases. In the first phase, we used a reflective thematic analysis tool, which simplifies a large amount of data into codes, categories, and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke et al., 2019). In the second phase, we picked out one theme and looked for tensions in the dialogues surrounding that theme to explore how a reflective process could enable the co-creation of knowledge.

First phase of analysis

Data were analysed in stages using dialogic reflective thematic analysis, inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006). (1) Recordings were listened to and transcribed; the transcripts were read, with notes made of possible themes. (2) Text was uploaded in NVivo, and meaningful units were categorised with codes. To apply the dialogical process to the data, we followed two paths: one in which we categorised the text as a 'research method' and the other in which we categorised text corresponding to 'the content of the empirical data.' The content of the empirical data refers to the descriptions of different perspectives and topics brought up by the participants when dialoguing about the practices of the outreach team. (3) Codes were read through to determine whether the categorisations made sense and to see if some of the text belonged to more than one code. We also considered how different codes could be combined to form overarching themes. (4) All themes were checked in relation to the codes. (5) We defined and named one main theme and five subthemes from Path one. As this was a study about research methods, in Path two we chose to single out just one theme describing practices in the team, which had one subtheme, to see how knowledge was co-created in the reflective process: *relational work in the outreach team*. We chose this theme because it was the theme that was discussed most in the reflective process (see Table 1).

Second phase of analysis

In the second phase, we looked for tensions and differences when the different participants talked together about the professional perspective: *relational work in the outreach team*. For this purpose, we used Phillips' (2011) Integrated Framework for Analysing Dialogical Knowledge Production and Communication (IFADIA) to analyse co-creation in dialogical processes as contrasts of interests. IFADIA combines action research with a Bakhtin-inspired focus on dialogue and Foucault's notion of power and is used as an analytical tool to focus on the tensions in the co-constructive process of knowledge with different voices (Phillips, 2011). From this perspective,

TABLE 1
Process of Analysis and Findings from the First Phase

Path one:	Path two:
Research method	The content of the empirical data
Main theme:	Main theme:
Tailoring for different voices	Relational work in the outreach team
Subthemes:	Subtheme:
Preparing to be researchers	Expert role
Bringing in one’s own experiences	
Generating other people’s voices	
Dialogical understandings	
Opening up for wonderings	

knowledge is understood as a product of dialogues, with tensions between different attitudes and points of view. This perspective contributes knowledge about concrete tensions that arise in a specific practice in which different concepts of knowledge meet.

Using IFADIA in this study increased awareness of knowledge production when different actors engaged in dialogues about different topics. This process of analysis consisted of reading the transcribed dialogues about the main professional theme, *relational work in the outreach team*. We searched for power imbalances, use of words, and possible discourses. With a focus on tensions, we had an epistemological assumption that discourses outside as well as within the context of the dialogue had an influence on the participants’ dialogue, as shaped by external structures, power relations, and how they talked about and understood their world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999).

Co-created Findings

Main themes

In this article we explore how the use of dialogical and reflective approaches in research can enhance knowledge development. As we strove for a dialogical methodology throughout this study, we also present the findings from the analysis in an open and reflective way, presenting a large number of extracts from the dialogues. These findings are what we as authors co-created through the process of analysis. In addition, we would like to emphasise that, as a reader, you are now invited to be part of the dialogue and co-creation of knowledge.

Path one. We co-created the finding *tailoring for different voices* as a main theme in the data on the research process. This theme was explored through the following sub-themes: *preparing to be researchers*, *bringing in one’s own experiences*, *generating other people’s voices*, *dialogical understandings*, and *opening up for wonderings*. The main theme, *tailoring of different voices*, concerns the entire process of working with the expert team and the design of the research project. This theme is understood to be a

way of facilitating research processes that enables different participants to contribute their experiences in a dialogical process.

Path two. As we followed the path of analysing the content of the empirical data, a main theme was co-created through the reflective process concerning *relational work*. This theme was introduced in the reflective process meeting by the researchers who had analysed data from the interviews and was picked up by both the facilitators and the outreach team in the dialogues. In the reflective process, *relational work* was co-created to encompass closeness in the relationships between the outreach team and the service users. The *expert role* was co-created as a subtheme.

The themes are illustrated with extracts of participants' dialogue from the different phases of the reflective process. As it was facilitated as a participatory process where we shifted between dialogue and listening, we present the findings through the actual phases that took place in the reflective process. This is a common thread through all the phases presented in the following. Through exploring dialogues about the theme *relational work* from Path two, we also explore the reflective process in Path one, expressed through the main theme, *tailoring for different voices*. We find this to be a useful illustration of the knowledge development in a dialogical process. We present a large amount of data to provide transparency for the reader. In the extracts, the co-researchers (service users) are referred to as 'C-R1' and 'C-R2,' the researcher as 'R,' the facilitators of the dialogical process (two co-authors) as 'F1' and 'F2,' and the outreach team members as 'T1,' 'T2,' and so on.

Dialogues between the researchers

In the first phase of the reflective process, the first author and the two co-researchers talked while the facilitators and the members of the outreach team listened. The preparations before the reflective process, as documented in the research diary, and the first phase of dialoguing, were understood as ways of *preparing to be researchers* in the study. *Preparing to be researchers* sheds light both on the process that was conducted up until the meeting and the participation in the reflective process. The subtheme of *preparing to be researchers* emerged from dialogues among the authors that explored what happened in the preparations before the meeting that could shed light on understanding the data.

The entire expert team took part in the preparations prior to the reflective process. They decided who should take part in the reflective process meeting, analysed data, and discussed which themes should be highlighted in the reflective process. Two team members were chosen by the team to take part in the reflective process and had experience as service users of the outreach team. *Preparing to be researchers* was created in dialogue about responsibilities about how one might present preliminary findings from interviews with young service users and their parents. This subtheme also explores how the co-researchers and the first author participated and their role in the reflective process.

In the preparation for the meeting, the first author and the co-researchers decided that the first author would start by asking the co-researchers about the themes. As this was a new setting for the co-researchers, they expressed nervousness about not being able to present findings well enough and remembering the themes to present. The first author was therefore responsible for keeping track of the themes during the

reflective process and bringing them into the dialogue by asking questions to get the dialogue going.

The following extract of reflections exemplifies how the subtheme *preparing to be researchers* was generated during the reflective process, based on preparations before the meeting. The extract shows how the first author during the reflective process was responsible for reminding the co-researchers about the topics they had decided to present while preparing for the process:

R: *But when we read the interviews with the young people, there was something you talked about yesterday. Having good relationships. Everybody says they have close relations with the service providers. What's more, there was something you said yesterday about someone who talked about a gift or something.*

C-R1: *Yes, one of them had a really close relationship with her contact in the outreach team. And she had received a gift, and she really appreciated the relationship they had. It was that feeling of loyalty that they actually care about you. That they are not just staff that do their work, but that they actually care.*

Dialogues between the researchers and the facilitators

Subtheme: Opening up for wonderings. In the second, fourth, and fifth phases the facilitators took part in the dialogues by asking questions. This constituted as the relevant subtheme *opening up for wonderings*. As the facilitators had been listening in on the dialogue without being able to comment, ask questions, or take part, *opening up for wonderings* shed light on the inner dialogue they had while listening. As facilitators, they were responsible for allowing others to take part in the dialogues when asking questions that had emerged while they listened, and they also contributed to the dialogues with their own reflections.

Opening up for wonderings was expressed as they entered a dialogue with the themes. In that sense, *opening up for wonderings* was a way of openly exploring themes they found interesting when they listened, as this reflection illustrates:

F1: *But if we think relationally, what is it about the young people that shows that you can connect?*

SP1: *Sincerity. I admire many of them who have had many bad experiences. Okay, and here comes a new person to say hello to. Then they actually do it. Push ahead again, even though they have had many bad experiences. They give us a chance. So I can feel that I have a strong respect for that. It costs a lot.*

Subtheme: Bringing in one's own experiences and generating other people's voices. Two other subthemes we co-created were *bringing in one's own experiences* and *generating other people's voices*. In the preparations before the reflective process meeting, the co-researchers discussed to what extent their role as researchers allowed them to bring in their own life experiences as service users of the outreach team. Talking about this revealed pros and cons. As an example, the co-researchers talked to service providers from whom they were still receiving help. The expert team decided that it would be acceptable to mention their experiences if they felt comfortable with that during the meeting, because it might shed light on why they had analysed the data as they had.

This subtheme shows how the different participants in the meeting used their experiences as service users and service providers, as well as their life experiences, to create understanding and knowledge about different topics. It also captures the co-researchers' way of combining their own experiences with the data and analysis that they had prepared to present at the meeting. During the meeting, they used their own experiences as a way of explaining how they understood the data from the interviews, and, in that sense, they were continuing the analysis in the reflective process meeting. As authors, we co-created *generating other people's voices* as the subtheme, as this reflection illustrates:

F2: *I was thinking, or I was just wondering, if there was anything that surprised you when you looked at the interviews with the parents and the young people?*

C-R1: *I don't know. Maybe that everybody was so positive. Well, my own experiences, my personal experiences with the team are only positive. However, I was thinking, I did maybe expect differences in opinions. But mostly they had the same opinions.*

C-R2: *Yes, and how far they'd go to help us. That rather surprised me.*

R: *Which parts of it?*

C-R2: *Well, like, they knock on your door if you don't feel like going out. They don't give up. Although I've personally found that they don't give up, I still thought it was good to read that. Yes, to read that.*

F2: *Read that others had that same experience, yes.*

Following the second path in the analysis of the content of the empirical data, *relational work*, we found that the participants, by bringing in their own experience, provided greater understanding of the relational work of the outreach team. As the reflection extract above demonstrates, the dialogues co-created relational work as being linked to perseverance and not giving up.

Dialogues between the members of the outreach team

Subtheme: Dialogical understandings. In the third phase of the reflective process meeting, it was the outreach team's turn to dialogue about what they had heard, what they had noticed, and what kinds of thoughts they had about various points. The subtheme that we, as authors, co-created in this phase was named *dialogical understandings*. The members of the outreach team responded with gratitude and dialogued about how they understood what they had heard presented by the researchers. A statement such as, 'They don't give up' was now taken as something they both related to, from how they saw their own practice, and as something they strove to achieve. *Dialogical understandings* also illustrate how they considered the positive feedback from the interviews with the service users as confirmation of their practice. 'They don't give up,' as quoted by one of the co-researchers, was now used as their own description of themselves and their work with the phrase 'We never give up,' as this reflection illustrates:

SP3: *I think it was. I was really moved when I heard them talk. In addition, I was very glad that they find that we go the distance. That may be the sample [of service users] we got hold of (laughs). I appreciate that, and now we can really feel it. It's really pretty hectic sometimes, but it was repeated: They don't give up.*

SP2: *That is a positive thing.*

SP3: *Yes, positive. Moreover, a good reminder to keep on doing that. Because it is one of our trademarks. Something that we brag about to our partners. That we don't give up.*

SP2: *We don't easily give up.*

SP3: *We don't give up before we are properly told to by the person concerned. I think that we check whether it is okay. And that might be what it takes sometimes. Walk the extra mile.*

Dialogues among all of the participants in the reflective process meeting

In the last phase of the reflective process meeting all the participants took part in the dialogue together. As seen in the next extract we found many of the subthemes represented. *Tailoring of different voices* was shown through the co-researchers *preparing to be researchers*, where they were both *generators of other people's voices* when presenting analysis of data from interviews and *bringing in their own experiences* as service users to shed light on how the themes were dialogued about. The facilitators brought in research-based knowledge when talking about relational work. The subtheme *opening up for wonderings* has a dimension of both bringing in one's own reflections from listening in the different phases and of what comes to mind when listening and talking about relational work. In a way the subtheme *dialogical understandings* shows how all the participants through the different phases have dialogued about the professional theme *relational work* in the outreach theme, both by listening and making sense of how they saw and understood professional helping relationships.

C-R1: *Yes, that person who said that it was like their mother. But they can also talk about things, they could maybe talk about boyfriends, like stuff they couldn't talk about at home. So it is like, but of course, what is important about all of this is that balance. Between being a professional and having that sort of expert role, but also being a person. And relating to a young person as a human being who also goes through stuff himself.*

C-R2: *Showing them kindness then.*

SP2: *Well, I think that it is, the most important thing is to show that we care about each other. Have an impact. I think that if we don't feel that, then there's no point in us being here. Or, well . . . (laughs).*

SP3: *And I am really happy about that research that you referred to earlier that says it pays to go outside the box. So boring inside that box.*

F1: *Yes, it is, the thing that's most important is that you make sure you don't make a ritual of going outside the box. And put it in a manual that you have to remember to go outside the box. You can just forget about the fake version. It is like that with bicycles or some toys, or it's like this. Or to be with someone longer than planned.*

R: *One of them said: I think or I believe that if I needed it she would cancel other appointments just to be with me. There is something genuine about it that you can't fake. She has that experience.*

C-O2: *That you feel special. And that is also important to know as staff, that when you're a young person here you can be very uncertain. And in a way, someone who knows your whole life, in a way they can help you, so it is like people look forward to . . . I can remember, there have been times in my life when the only thing I was thinking of was that I was looking forward so much to Friday to meet (name). It is like, it is what you look forward to. It means a whole lot.*

Following the second path of the professional theme *relational work* throughout the analysis of the different phases of the reflective process meeting, we found that the understanding of *relational work* developed. The participants added more and more elements of what a helping relationship should consist of through exploring different thoughts based on experiences of needing help, helping others, research knowledge, and also the dialogues in the meeting itself.

The aftermath

After the reflective process meeting, the first author and the co-researchers discussed their experiences of taking part in the study as researchers. One of the topics highlighted was a realisation of never having found service providers to be uncertain about their work. The co-researchers described the discovery that being a professional also comes with an insecure state of mind as to how to help the people they collaborate with. They also appreciated the openness around this from the members of the outreach team. In their experience as service users, this topic had not been raised when receiving help.

Tensions in the dialogues about relational work

As we explored how the main theme, *relational work*, was discussed in the reflective process, we co-created a subtheme associated with the role of being an expert. Dialoguing about relational work and being a service provider were seen as a form of expert role. Talking about this introduced tension in the dialogues between the participants. The researchers were the ones who first brought up the notion of expert in the dialogues and presented this as a finding from the interviews with the parents. Further on in the dialogues, the researchers created an understanding of this being connected to having an important role in a family, expectations to fulfil, parents letting go of responsibility, qualifications, and competence, as this reflection illustrates:

C-R1: *Yes, it was rather interesting to see that, when you talked to the parents, that the service providers after a while had such an important role in the families. The service providers in a way got an expert role, and they have some expectations to fulfil. It is interesting to see what the dynamics between the service providers is like.*

When analysing the data, we explored the tensions in the dialogues about the expert role using IFADIA. We co-created three different groups of voices among the participants in the dialogues: The *user voice*, the *problematizing voice*, and the *voice of virtue*. These voices were carried by different participants in the dialogues and were not represented by just one group such as the service providers. All three voices created were represented by the researchers, the members of the outreach team, and the facilitators in the dialogues. For this reason, we do not attribute the quotes below to particular speakers as in the extracts above.

The *user voice* perceived the expert role as something the parents appreciated, that they expected from the outreach team, and as a source of relief and help for a problem they had. The *user voice* created the expert role as qualified help from professionals. The second voice, the *problematizing voice*, brought in the concept of power that lies in being an expert. Phrases that express how the expert role can be problematic are exemplified by these quotes: 'they believe that here there are very clever people that know something they don't,' 'the power that lies in that,' and 'they truly trust you.' The *problematizing voice* explored the expert role through dialogues about

limitations and pitfalls that could occur in a collaboration partially built on being seen as an expert. The last voice we co-created from the tensions in dialogues was *the voice of virtue*. In relation to content regarding what relational work should be, virtue was created as a contrast to the expert role. Familiar phrases from professional work in mental health services make up the *voice of virtue*, as illustrated in this quote: “don’t want to be in an expert role, I feel, because I am not an expert on other people’s life.”

The tensions within the dialogues about the expert roles that were co-created during the reflective process led to a consensus about relational work, which was that being an expert was connected to some risks of misuse of power and trust.

Reflections and Discussion

The aim of this study was to contribute to knowledge about the development of collaborative research designs by enabling different voices and experiences in research. By exploring and describing the use of dialogical and reflective approaches in knowledge development, we hope to add to the literature on more democratic methodologies for research in the field of mental health. We have explored how dialogical methods may provide a research setting that can enable a democratic process of knowledge development in which voices of many different actors are given space.

We found the main finding to be *tailoring for different voices*, which applied to the entire research process from designing the research project, preparing the reflective process with the expert team, to conducting the reflective process throughout five different phases of dialogue. This main theme was explored and expounded through the subthemes and findings: *preparing to be researchers, bringing in one’s own experiences, generating other people’s voices, dialogical understandings, and opening up for wonderings*.

The reflective process was facilitated in a way that allowed all participants to take part in the dialogue, with the hope that this atmosphere would encourage them to share their voices, opinions, and experiences, and introduce a way of thinking aloud together. Together, we tried to understand aspects of the dialogue by using our own ideas and experiences to have an inner and outer dialogue in a polyphonic manner about themes in a shared space and time (Frank, 2005). Tensions arose when participants tried to co-create knowledge about different topics, but the tensions were toned down in the dialogues, and agreement was sought, and finally a consensus was reached during the reflective team process. The discourse of dialogue, at least in a Western setting, involves a concept of coming to a consensus of understanding (Beresford, 2003; Borg, Karlsson, Kim, & McCormack, 2012). Habermas inferred that this concept normally lies in language itself, which leads us to oppose consensus and lets us be convinced by the better argument (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Norway has an egalitarian and homogenous history, and the goal of consensus can therefore be a challenge when trying to raise many voices with different perspectives for the purpose of developing knowledge.

Even though we aspired to create a safe context for dialogue and knowledge development, there are different discourses both outside and within the research setting. The mental health field is one area in which the principal topic of dialogues has competing discourses, such as biomedical or social explanatory models for understanding and treating mental health problems (Ekeland, 2011). These discourses are linked to power and to who claims what in different communities of practice. The biomedical

understanding has historically had a superior position over other explanatory models, for example with regard to understanding people and their difficulties in a social context (Ekeland, 2011). Foucault (1967) wrote about how madness was constituted as illness in the late 1700s with the dialogue between madness and reason cut off. As one discourse won out in the hegemony, the epistemology of mental health as an illness has had a strong influence on what is seen as necessary knowledge and what is given precedence in practice.

One reflection from analysing the dialogues in this research project has been that different voices of tensions may represent competing discourses in the mental health field. The fact that these differences occurred in a setting in which the participants were given the task of co-creating knowledge about providing help in this field could be seen both as a strength and a weakness in the reflective process method for the co-creation of knowledge. We do not believe it is possible or even desirable to disengage from existing discourses but as authors and researchers in this study, we have striven to develop methods that can create a space in which we, together, can explore our own beliefs and discourses and create knowledge together with different voices.

The underlying assumption of this study is the incomplete nature of knowledge and the perception that different people have different voices when participating in dialogues. A reflective process could be a setting that encourages people to both listen and talk and, in that sense, have both inner and outer dialogues that might endorse the use of different types of knowledge, including research and lived experiences, to create new understandings together (Frank, 2005). We believe that we have explored some research methods that can make room for a polyphony of voices by using the reflective process as a setting for dialoguing about mental health services among service users, providers, and researchers via the dialogical analysis method, which both examines the research methods and the content from the dialogues. Like Kidd et al. (2018), we believe that developing research methods to co-create knowledge is a process of lifelong learning and unlearning, and it is a search for exploring the right questions and language for enabling inquiry into the co-creation of knowledge with different participants.

Conclusion and implications

This article offers insights into how researchers and participants can come together in dialogue to co-create knowledge in the mental health field. The findings show that reflective processes can encourage people to both listen and talk and, in that sense, have both inner and outer dialogues that might endorse the use of different types of knowledge, including research and lived experiences, to create new understandings together. Reflective processes, however, need to be facilitated through advance preparation and guided reflection that encourage all participants to contribute their experiences and reflections.

The findings of this study are relevant for mental healthcare researchers and professionals who wish to explore how to develop knowledge and services in collaboration between service users and providers. They show how tensions in collaborative dialogues can provide meaningful knowledge about what can be lost because participants desire consensus.

Further research is needed on how to design projects that encourage participants with different experiences to contribute their reflections, opinions, and knowledge. However, we find it undesirable to draw any conclusions with you as a reader, as the

dialogical process is still ongoing. As authors, we have tried to reflect on the study in an open and transparent manner, but we have no control over how this work is perceived by different readers.

This article offers an insight into the authors' perceptions of how researchers and participants can come together to dialogue and co-create knowledge. It also presents dialogical analyses and reflections about this strategy as a research method, which can offer perspectives on how knowledge can be created in the mental health field. As our readers now become part of the dialogue, the reflections on how to develop collaborative research methods can continue.

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