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Negotiating Knowledges in 'Dialogic' Knowledge Production and Communication

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In the literature on dialogic, interactive research, “dialogue” tends to be a vague term, a form of ‘empty signifier’ with a taken-for-granted positive value. There are relatively few attempts to interrogate the concept of dialogue as a social or discursive construction that constitutes knowledge and power in particular fields of practice. The paper takes the first steps towards *a systematic empirical analysis of dialogue as a social/discursive construction*, drawing on existing attempts that have been made. Dialogue is conceptualised in terms of the *negotiation of knowledges*, focusing on processes of interaction both with respect to the forms of knowledge and with respect to the actors and the construction of actor-identities and relations including relations of power. The paper first briefly sketches out the terrain of dialogic research communication practices which the wider research project has as its object of analysis. Then, a case-study is outlined of the communication of knowledges in an interactive, practice-oriented research and development initiative, and the early stages of an analysis of the case are sketched out. By a focus on the specific case of practice-oriented research and development consultancy, the aim is to show how empirically-grounded insight can be produced into the discursive construction of dialogue in the interactive communication of research-based knowledge. The paper has a practice orientation not only in the sense that it analyses practice but also in that the aim is that the completed analysis will contribute to the design of new communication practices.

Negotiating Knowledges in ‘Dialogic’ Knowledge Production and Communication¹

In contemporary societies, the legitimacy of science is not taken for granted and, within the terms of the dominant discourse and in line with a growing marketization of university research, scientific knowledge is called upon to prove its utility as a resource for social innovation (eg. Danish Government's Action Plan, 2003). The influential analysis of Gibbons et al (1994) and Nowotny et al (2001) claims that science/society relations have become more interactive or dialogic, with science being urged to produce “socially robust” knowledge in interaction with the rest of society. Certainly, the boundaries between science and the rest of society can be said to be porous and characterised by continual interaction. Since that interaction takes places through mediated and non-mediated communication processes, the **communication** of research-based knowledge has necessarily come to play a central role (see eg Catapano 2001)². A key development here is the growth of so-called mode 2 research whereby research problems are formulated in interaction or 'dialogue' between several different actors and their different perspectives (Nowotny 2007). Thus the context for any research endeavour is a product of a process of communication among a set of stakeholders (Nowotny 2007).

Despite the central role of communication in dialogic research practices, the well-established nature of the fields of science communication and the public understanding of science and the large number of reflexive accounts of dialogic knowledge production practices, dialogic approaches to communication can be said to constitute an “emerging research area” rather than an established field (Anderson, Baxter and Cissna 2004). In the emerging research area of dialogic approaches to communication, the analytical focus is not specifically on the content of research-based knowledge forms but on the *processes* of dialogic communication. And in most reflexive accounts of interactive forms of knowledge production, the focus is not *specifically* on communication processes. The research project on which I base this paper foregrounds **both** the production of specific knowledge forms **and** communication processes. The aim of my project is to contribute to the emerging research area of dialogic communication studies by *empirical study of the so-called “dialogic” communication of research and what it entails in different contexts of practice in the light of issues of power, democracy and social control*. The theoretical framework draws on dialogic approaches to the analysis and practice of communication (Anderson, Baxter and Cissna 2004) – including those accounts that foreground communication in analysing interactive knowledge production (e.g. Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen 2004). Dialogic approaches are combined in the framework with a discourse analytical approach which analyses the communication of knowledge as complex processes of meaning production –

1 This paper is an account of “work-in-process”, produced while I am in the process of conducting field-work in relation to three case-studies, one of which is outlined in this paper.

2 Linked to the dialogic turn, there is huge party-political support for the improvement of the quality of research communication, including in the Nordic countries (see eg. Aagaard and Mejlgård 2003; Ministry of Science, DK, 2004). Thus a number of concrete initiatives for the promotion of research communication have been launched such as legislation in Denmark and Sweden which has made it mandatory for researchers to communicate their research outside the university (Danish University Law, 2003; Swedish constitutional register, 1996:1392), the establishment by the Danish Ministry of Science of a think-tank on research communication in 2003 (Ministry of Science, DK, 2004), and the setting-up of the Danish Research Database and internet portals for research communication in Norway (forskning.no) and Sweden (forskning.se). And often advocates of these initiatives argue for a “dialogue-based” approach (see eg Ministry of Science, DK, 2004).

involving the operation of power – taking place in specific institutional and social contexts which enable and constrain that meaning-making (see eg. Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).³

In the literature on dialogic, interactive approaches, “dialogue” tends to be a vague term that is not ascribed a precise meaning – a form of empty signifier (Laclau and Mouffe 1985)⁴ almost devoid of meaning, signifying something positive often in a chain of equivalence together with signifiers such as “democracy”, “co-operation”, “collaboration”, “co-inquiry”, “interaction with participants”, and “negotiation”. Thus the positive quality of dialogue is taken for granted so that it requires no supporting argumentation.⁵ There are relatively few attempts to interrogate the concept of dialogue as a social or discursive construction that constitutes knowledge and power in particular ways that exclude alternatives. My paper takes the first steps towards *a systematic empirical analysis of dialogue as a social/discursive construction*, drawing on those attempts that have been made (see below). In the wider project on which this paper is based, I draw in my empirical analysis on conceptualisations of dialogue in different dialogic approaches to practice-oriented communication theory which themselves draw variously on theorists such as Buber, Gadamer and Bakhtin (see eg. Anderson et al, 2001; Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen; see also footnote 4). I conceptualise dialogue in terms of the *negotiation of knowledges*, focusing on processes of interaction both with respect to the forms of knowledge and with respect to the actors and the construction of actor-identities and relations including relations of power. Thus I seek to *develop* the twin concepts of dialogue and negotiation through empirical study in which I *apply* the concepts. My own approach is itself designed to be interactive – I have entered a collaborative agreement with the actors I am studying, I use an approach to observation in which I make explicit to participants that my observations are based on the co-operative agreement, and my aim is also practice-oriented – I hope to produce an analysis that can be used in the design of new social and organisational practices (both those I have entered into agreement with and others).

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- 3 In further analysis to be included in a later version of this paper, I will also draw theoretically on science and technology studies (STS) which research the co-production of scientific knowledge and its contexts, including communication efforts designed to contribute to the public understanding of science (eg. Latour 2005, Law 2004). By combining dialogic STS with approaches to communication and the discourse analytical approach to communication, the attempt is to build a bridge that links communication studies, which provide insights into the communication of knowledge, science and technology studies which provide insights into the production of knowledge and interactive research which practises the production of knowledge in ways that integrate the communication of knowledge in the whole research process rather than relegating it to the end. Furthermore, by drawing on research on the production and communication of knowledge in the natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, the aim is that the insights of research on the natural sciences (for example, research on media representations of the natural sciences and technology such as research on the human genome or genetically modified foods) and research on the production and communication of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities (much less researched than the natural sciences and technology) will be able to cross-fertilize one another.
4. “Dialogue” often appears to be used in the same vague fashion across different contexts with its positive quality being taken for granted across the board. It may be that a discourse of dialogue has achieved a high degree of hegemonic closure with dialogue as its nodal point (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), ordering the meanings of the other signs such as “negotiation” and thus partially fixing meaning. However, at the same time, there ARE different, and competing, concepts of dialogue in use across different dialogic approaches to communication theory and practice (Anderson et al 2004) and in my project I will draw on some of these different conceptualisations of dialogue in my empirical analysis thus engaging in a form of deconstruction of the empty signifier, “dialogue”.
- 5 See Plesner (2007) for a similar analysis of the empty signifiers, “communication of research” and “the public”.

This paper first briefly sketches out the terrain of dialogic research communication practices which the wider research project has as its object of analysis, making clear the theoretical perspective applied in constructing this terrain. Then, one of the case-studies in the project is outlined – namely, a case-study of a research and development consultancy –and the early stages of an analysis of the case are sketched out.⁶ By a focus on the specific case of practice-oriented research and development consultancy, the aim is to show how empirically-grounded insight can be produced into the discursive construction of dialogue in the interactive communication of research-based knowledge.

Constructing a Terrain of Dialogic Research Communication Practices

First, what do I understand by “research-based knowledge”? I define it in broad terms, as knowledge that emanates from research in the social sciences, humanities or natural sciences (see Weigold, 2001 for a presentation of similarly “broad” definitions of “science”). The dialogic turn stands in contrast to the traditional understanding of research communication as the one-way transmission of finished results to the public often via the mass media, based on the so-called deficit model that attributed public scepticism towards research to the public's lack of knowledge and viewed the provision of knowledge as a means to (re)gain the public's faith in science and resolve the legitimacy crisis (Irwin and Wynne 1996). Approaches to the communication of research with dialogic ambitions are practised in a wide range of different social domains. They are often constructed as involving some kind of democratically-conceived knowledge-sharing between the researcher and relevant social actors/stakeholders. To take one example, the dialogic communication of research can take the form of the communication of expert, research-based knowledge in dialogue with other knowledge forms in communication campaigns designed to affect change in relation to, for example, smoking, obesity or the treatment of psychiatric patients.

A second type of dialogic research communication occurs in public consultation exercises officially designed to further public involvement in decision-making (eg. UK's Public Consultation on Developments in the Biosciences, 1997-1999, see Irwin, 2001; GM nation? Debate over the commercial growing of GM crops in the UK, 2003, see Irwin 2006; consensus conferences, see Andersen and Jæger, 1999). A third type is where dialogic research communication, in negotiation with other knowledge forms, is integrated into interactive, practice-oriented research in which researchers and social actors/stakeholders co-produce knowledge in order to further change in practices (see eg. Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2006). Interactive, practice-oriented research encompasses a very broad range of different approaches spanning from participatory research based on democratic, and sometimes emancipatory, ideals to research and development consultancy work taking a interactive approach but without articulated democratic ambitions (see eg. Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2006 and Aagaard Nielsen and Svensson, 2006 on types of research associated with interactive research and action research). The research project on which I base this paper contains case-studies of these three types, with the case-study presented in the paper being an instance of the third type.

In interactive, practice-oriented research, the communication of research-based knowledge is conceived not as the transmission of completed research results to a less-informed audience but as an integral part of the production of knowledge in which the

6 For an analysis of the case-study on the second example - the communication of research-based knowledge in change-oriented strategic communication - see forthcoming paper with provisional title “Enacting ‘dialogue’ in interactive health communication”.

researcher and other actors participate actively. According to researchers engaged in interactive research, the production of knowledge takes place through "knowledge-sharing", "collaborative co-inquiry", "dialogue" or a "negotiation" of knowledge forms. There are a huge range of different approaches to interactive, practice-oriented research with different understandings of role of theory and the role of the researcher and relations between the researcher and the field, ideals with respect to democracy and emancipation. Within the field of practice-oriented research, there is a tendency to assume convergence and mutuality among the different participants with respect to knowledge interests and thus to neglect differences in, and potential conflicts with respect to, knowledge claims and interests.⁷

Common to many approaches to interactive, practice-oriented research is a *practical* perspective with respect to theory: theory is used to generate analytical descriptions of the world that are then used as the foundation for interventions by researchers designed to affect change in the world whilst taking into account the interests of the involved actors. For instance, as Pearce and Pearce put it (2001:107) in their account of what they call "practical theory", "[P]rinciples and models provide perspicacious descriptions that answer the question 'What's going on here?' and enable prudent action - that is, they answer the question 'what should I do now?'". Practice- or action oriented researchers interact with key actors including the participants in the research project, other practitioners and theorists, and – at least, officially – they attempt to accommodate to the interests of all the stakeholders. Thus practice-oriented research is engaged in practices not only in the sense that it produces an analysis of practices but also in the sense that that analysis is oriented towards furthering change in those or similar practices. Theory, then, is produced in context and hence is context-dependent. Practice-oriented approaches, then, are in line with, if not directly inspired by, or based upon, post-foundationalist and social constructionist understandings of knowledge as the contingent product of relational practices in historically and socially specific contexts.

Different dialogic approaches to practice-oriented communication theory operate with different understandings of dialogue. Pearce and Pearce (2004), for example, distance themselves from a popular approach among consultants in corporate America whereby dialogue is conceived as an entity designating a particular type of communication. When applied in practice, this approach leads to a form of communication with the following three-part speech act: the speaker first affirms the preceding utterance, for instance, by expressing thanks for the input or by paraphrasing it, then makes a bridge such as "that makes me think of" and then says what it is that she is thinking. Throughout, the speaker strives to speak to the "center of the room" and to avoid "interpersonal dynamics" (Pearce and Pearce, 2004: 45; citing Isaacs 1999: 380). In contrast, Pearce and Pearce align themselves with the set of approaches in which dialogue is not a particular *type* of communication but a *quality* of communication such that one can communicate dialogically in any form of communication. Here, the defining feature of dialogic communication is that the speaker maintains her own position whilst permitting others the space to maintain theirs and is "profoundly open" to hearing the positions of others (2004: 45). They dub this move "remaining in the tension"⁸ between standing one's own ground and being profoundly open to the other" (2004: 45). It is underpinned by the understanding that one's own perspective is partial and local. And for

7 See Hee Pedersen and Ravn Olesen (2007) for an analysis that takes its starting-point in a critique of this tendency and examines the implications of such differences and conflicts for knowledge production and the relations between the researcher and the other participants.

8 This echoes the philosophies of dialogue of Buber, Bakhtin, Freire, Bohm and Gadamer in which tensionality is a key feature (Stewart, Zediker and Black 2004).

Pearce and Pearce, listening plays a central role in the creation of dialogue since it is the precondition for hearing the other's position. In this paper, I deal with this idea of "tension" and, more specifically, the tension between different perspectives, through the concept of the negotiation of knowledge forms.

Empirical Study

The case-study sketched out in this paper is one of two case-studies on interactive, practice-oriented research in the wider project. The case is an example of research and development consultancy in which researchers cooperate as researcher-consultants with participants in a field of practice with a view to furthering change in practices. The other case – not described in this paper – emanates from the field of participatory research in which the researchers, in the name of emancipatory ideals, engage participants in a field of practice as co-researchers in the production of knowledge with a view to practice change.

The Research Questions

The research project, in its present, preliminary phase, is geared towards addressing questions such as the following:

- What happens when different forms of knowledge and participant-identities meet in the dialogic communication of social scientific knowledge? More specifically:
- What happens to social scientific knowledge when it is communicated interactively?
- What kinds of interactions occur when social scientific knowledge and other forms of knowledge meet? [How] can some of such interactions be understood as "negotiations of knowledge"?
- What kind of participant-identities are constructed in communication processes with what consequences for the different actors' scope for action?
- What are the implications of different discursive constructions of "dialogue" for communication between, and the room for action of, the different participants?
- And what are the relations between, on the one hand, the ideals behind dialogic knowledge production and communication with respect to dialogue, power and democracy, and, on the other hand, the concrete practices, whereby negotiations take place between the different participants and knowledges?

In this paper, I reduce the level of abstraction slightly to address three questions through empirical analysis of my case:

- What kinds of knowledges are communicated in the case in question?
- [How] can this communication be understood as a "negotiation of knowledges"?
- And what specific discursive construction(s) of "dialogue" is/are articulated in the interactive communication of knowledge in the case under study and with what implications for the actors' scope for action?

In the project, then, I analyse different discursive constructions of "dialogue", concentrating on the negotiation between different knowledge forms in different types of research communication which are constructed within their own fields of practice as being in some way interactive. In order to scrutinize dialogical ambitions in research communication in the light of questions of power and control, I address the relations between the ideals of dialogic knowledge production and communication with respect to dialogue, power and democracy, on the one hand, and, on the other hand the concrete practices in which negotiations take

place between the different participants and the different forms of knowledge under social, political and organisational conditions that constrain what can be said and done. A key theme is how dialogic discourses work to constitute knowledge and power relations in particular ways that mask, marginalise or totally exclude other ways of knowing and doing by, for instance, connoting a dominance-free site for conversation among equals.

Here I align myself with existing critical analyses of the concept of dialogue and related concepts, such as Kvæle's critical analysis of the dangers of dialogic conceptions of interviewing (2006), Boor Tonn's interrogation of "dialogue" and "conversation" as spaces for the discourse of therapy (2005), Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen's examination of dialogue as a new form of power (2004) and Weems's deconstruction of "reciprocity" (2006). Kvæle challenges the understanding of research as "warm, caring and empowering dialogues" (2006: 480), examining how the concept of dialogue itself works to mask the power asymmetries in interview relations through the denial of power differences and the assertion of mutuality and egalitarianism. And, similarly, Boor Tonn argues that the "privileging of the self, personal experiences and individual perspectives of reality" inherent in the dialogic model individualizes social problems. In a reflexive analysis of their own activities as practitioners of dialogic action research, Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen focus on how dialogues enacted in organisations by dialogic action researchers can operate as technologies of power that are "not only transformational" but also work to privilege the position of the researcher and restrict the scope of action of the practitioners engaged as co-researchers (Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen 2004: 386). And Weems interrogates "reciprocity" as a concept that is designed as a "liberatory corrective" (2006: 995) to hegemonic, positivist practices of social science but which ends up in the service of those practices through being materialized in texts that reinscribe positivist assumptions and thus reproduce the hegemonic discourses.

Through systematic empirical study of researchers' published texts, Weems demonstrates how researchers' representations of reciprocity may work to maintain hierarchical power relations between the researcher and the researched as contemporary representations of reciprocity operate within a discourse of market logic that conflates efficacy, equity and truth with identification. And on the basis of this study, she questions whether, given its discursive functioning, "reciprocity" is possible or desirable in all contexts. Through empirical study of a series of cases of dialogic communication in different contexts, I attempt a parallel empirical analysis of the discursive construction of "dialogue", without assuming that dialogue necessarily has negative or positive consequences. What different understandings - or discursive constructions - of "dialogue" and the "dialogic" prevail in the different contexts? And what are the consequences of the different discourses for power relations between - and the different scopes of action of - participants in the different practices?

My research design is itself interactive with respect to the two case-studies. I have entered into an agreement with the organisers in both cases that I will give feedback on the basis of my analysis and that I will formulate this feedback so that the implications for practice will be made clear and I will engage in discussion with them about how the implications for practice could form the basis for suggestions or recommendations for change in practice. In addition, I use an approach to observation whereby I take part in frequent discussions with the organisers about what I am observing. With respect to the case sketched out below, I have presented analytical points to the organisers and noted and discussed their comments to my points. Moreover, in the initial analysis presented below, I have taken into account the comments of the organisers to the points I made in discussion with them.

The Case

The research and development project which is the object of the case-study analysed in this paper is not based on explicitly formulated democratic ideals but does operate on the basis of

the view that changes to practices can be made through the researchers' collaboration with the actors in the relevant field. It has the main attributes of mode 2 research including a practice-oriented approach to theory, taking the form of a research and development project with the aim of not just providing an analytical description of practices but of developing or transforming those practices in interaction with relevant social actors. And the formulation of the problem and the design of the project are the product of an agreement between the researchers and the organisation who has commissioned the project.

The project is run by two researchers, Niels and Anna,⁹ at a research institute attached to a Danish university and consists of several main features. First, the development part took the form of a series of workshops tailored to members of management in a public organisation on how to run meetings that create more value for external stakeholders and more personal meaning for participants. In the following, I refer to Niels and Anna as researcher-consultants. The idea of meaning and value derive from theoretical concepts developed in earlier research by the two researcher-consultants. The current project and previous research belong to an overarching research initiative on the facilitation of knowledge processes. Second, the course as a whole is understood by the researcher-consultants as practice-oriented, transformative research that draws on theory and the researchers' practical experience with previous projects and research findings produced in their previous research and development projects. It is inspired by design-based intervention research whereby research-based analysis is used to devise and apply a plan – or design – for an intervention and its evaluation (Rothman and Thomas, 1994); the design, then, works on the basis of a vision about how practices could and should be different. This is contrasted to research which, on the basis of a formulation of a problem, produces a critical report on existing conditions, ending up perhaps in a few more or less vaguely formulated pointers as to interventions that could ameliorate those conditions.

Third, the feature which the researcher-consultants view as a primary characteristic that qualifies their project as research-based rather than the work of consultants is the pre-post measurement of meeting practices in the organisation. The aim of such analysis is to carry out a scientific evaluation of the effects of the project; the analysis, then, explores whether and to what extent an improvement in practices has taken place. Much consultant work, it is asserted, lacks this scientific evaluation of the effects of their intervention. The researcher-consultants also view the project as research and themselves as researchers by virtue of their building on previous analyses of similar projects. Another feature of the project is the use of a research method which is popular in mode 2 and action research projects: that of appreciative inquiry which, on the basis of a visionary perspective on change and principles deriving from positive psychology, focuses on positive aspects of organisational practices with a view to developing them further rather than on problematizing weaknesses (see eg Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney and Yaeger 2000). Since all of these features are defining characteristics of the project that construct it discursively as one particular type of project, they obviously shape the relations and forms of knowledge that are realised in the project. More specifically, the contract which the researcher-consultants have entered into with the actors in the field works to frame the project and thus has central implications for relations and knowledge forms. For instance, the course of workshops was commissioned by management in the public organisation on the initiative of management not the participants, and although participants were not forced to attend the course, they were encouraged to attend by management. According to the researchers, the commissioning of the project by management meant that the drop-out rate of participants from the first to the second workshop relatively high (5 people

9 I have anonymised the researchers by using fictive names and by not identifying the research institute.

attended workshop 1b as opposed to 9 in workshop 1a; 28 attended workshop 2b in contrast to 40 in workshop 2a), as compared with courses where participants themselves take the initiative to attend, either applying for funding from their workplace or paying for it themselves; the researchers make the point that this is a pattern that repeats itself.

The development part of the research and development project took the form of an orientation meeting followed by a series of 3 workshops. The first two workshops were held in April and May 2007 and were duplicated. In the following analysis, I refer to them as workshop 1a and 1b (the first workshop, duplicated) and 2a and 2b (the second workshop, duplicated). The topic of the first workshop (1a and 1b) was how to facilitate meetings that create value while the topic of the second (2a and 2b) was to facilitate meetings that get people involved. The focus of the first workshop was on how to regulate both process and form, while the focus of the second was on how to facilitate meetings that engage and involve the participants. In both cases, the researcher-consultants ran the workshop on the basis of a script that gave a systematic outline of the programme and was detailed with respect to the timing of the different activities. The workshops consisted of a combination of presentations by the researcher-consultants and group exercises which the participants took part in on the basis of instructions by Niels and Anna.

As noted above, I use observation as a main method of data production, creating observational data through field-notes. I combine observation with audio-recording of the workshops, a semi-structured interview with one of the researcher-consultants, informal conversations with the researcher-consultants and analysis of documents produced by the researcher-consultants such as workshop scripts and powerpoint presentations given by the researcher-consultants at the workshops. My observations were underpinned by a theoretical focus on the negotiation of knowledge forms and dialogic relations using the concepts of knowledge negotiation and dialogue. I arrived at this theoretical focus through my reading of literature on dialogic, interactive approaches to knowledge production and communication and my initial discussions with the researcher-consultants. My approach to observation is informed by an ethnomethodological approach to ethnography, such that I am interested in how the phenomena of knowledge negotiation and dialogue are constituted through the active accomplishment of the participants (Silverman 2001). The theoretically informed questions that guided my observations were as follows:

- 1) What knowledge is constructed discursively?
How do Niels and Anna construct knowledge claims?
What kind of knowledge is constructed?
Is the knowledge presented as being based on experience? If so how? With what degree of certainty? (modality)? What stories are told?
Is the knowledge presented as being based on research? If so how? With what degree of certainty? What stories do they tell?
What discourse(s) are articulated?

- 2) How is knowledge negotiated in dialogue between Niels and Anna and participants?
When and how do Niels and Anna open up for questions and comments?
What question does the participant ask or what comments does she/he make?
Is the question or comment in line with what N/A have said or does it challenge it in some way and if so how?
How do N and A respond to questions and comments?
Is the response in line with what the participant has said or does it challenge it in some way and if so how?
How do N and A interact with one another?

First Analytical Steps

The analysis is in its initial stages. In the following, I sketch out some of the themes that I have identified through this initial analysis:

1. Tension between teacher-control and participant activity and agency. And what happens when participants carry out the exercises “wrongly”?
2. The anchoring of the workshops in research. What kind of knowledge is constructed?
3. The negotiation of knowledge. How do Niels and Anna put their knowledge(s) into play with the knowledge(s) of the participants?
4. Time control/time management: How does the tight control of time/tight time-management frame the communication and negotiation of knowledge?

The analysis is based on an approach to discourse analysis that combines elements of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), critical discourse analysis (eg Fairclough 1992, 1995) and discursive psychology (eg Potter, 1996, Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The approach unites an interest in how particular discourses construct particular objects and subjects and an interest in how discourses are used as flexible resources in creating and negotiating representations of the world and identities in talk-in-interaction. The focus is on the discursive construction of “knowledge” and the construction of subjects through subject positions. In the following, first analytical steps, though, I have not systematically applied the approach.

Tension between teacher-control and participant activity and agency. And what happens when participants carry out the exercises “wrongly”?

One thread which I am exploring is the tension in relation to teacher-control and participants' agency/activity. The tension can be best identified in those situations where, from the perspective of the observer, things appear to go wrong. The organisers want to control and manage what happens but, at the same time, they want the participants to play an active role through “learning by doing”. Thus there is a combination of, on the one hand, teacher-presentations where they put forward their knowledge and, on the other hand, group exercises where the participants work actively in a way that is directed towards their acquisition of some knowledge or some techniques for practice that are based on knowledge that emanates from the presentations. Following each presentation by Niels or Anna, the participants take part in a group exercise in which they themselves apply techniques for facilitating meetings. The participants are supposed to carry out the group exercises in such a way that they adopt the knowledge or techniques for practice. After each group exercise, there is a plenum session in which the participants mention something they learned from the exercise such as a facilitation technique, or, as in the case of role play exercises, the participants that had observed the role-play give feedback to the ones who had taken part. In all plenum sessions, both Niels and Anna and the other participants give affirmative, supportive responses using terms such as “super” and “they were good at....”. Niels and Anna also sometimes reformulate what a participant has said, as in the following example from workshop 2b:

In plenum discussion of what participants had learned from the group exercise:

Morten: You have to watch out that you don't limit yourself.

Niels: Super. Not just involvement but adjustment.

[Morten: Man skal passe på man ikke begrænser sig

Niels: Super. Ikke bare involvering men kvalificering]

But what happens when the participants do not carry out the exercises in such a way that they learn a technique? And who is the judge of this? Anna and Niels made a judgement of this as part of their assessment of whether the workshop was a success: in one case (the last group exercise on day 2), they noted that the participant playing the role of meeting leader did not do what he should and that the exercise was therefore not a success with respect to giving suggestions for techniques that participants could apply in their future meeting practices. This demonstrates that they have a clear idea of what the exercise ought to achieve in terms of techniques for future practice. Knowledge, then, takes the form of know-how about appropriate techniques for practice. Niels and Anna are aware when things do not go as they ought to. This illustrates the difficult balancing-act that occurs with the use of practical exercises in which participants act freely within the framework of the exercise in order to produce a particular form of knowledge about techniques for practice. What is at stake is a tension between teacher-control, on the one hand, and room for the participants' own activity, on the other; between the aim of producing specific knowledge and of wanting participants to produce that knowledge themselves through learning-by-doing in the exercises.

The use of appreciative pedagogical methods whereby only positive comments are given of participants' performance also creates problems when the participants act in a way that the organisers consider to be wrong. The use of the methods of appreciative inquiry contributes to supporting practices which may not be in line with the aims of the organisers with respect to the knowledge they wish the participants to acquire. For example, Anna says "thank you very much for putting on a good show" ("tusind tak for fin teaterforestilling") which is a positive response although she does not think that the meeting-leader did it well (she told me this in the break following the exercise) and she then opens up for additional affirmative comments. Appreciative or affirmative pedagogical methods were also used to endorse the "wrong" application of a concept presented earlier by Niels or Anna that is, an application of a concept which may not have been in line with Niels' or Anna's understanding of the concept. An example of this took place when someone made the following comment to the meeting-leader's performance and Anna gave the following response:

Participant: Was that not on one of the slides?

Anna: Do you mean bridge-building? Yes, you could say that (Translation)

[Participant: Var det ikke det der står på en planche?

Anna: "Brobygning mener du? Ja, det kunne man sige" (Danish)]

Anna's judgement at the time (according to what she said to me at the end of the day) was that the meeting-leader had not done a good job in the role-play and therefore it is very possible that the meeting-leader did not perform a "bridge-building" which is a concept that describes a positive technique for facilitating meetings. But nevertheless Anna gives the appreciative response "yes, you could say that" and thus endorses this application of one of her concepts, indicating that the commentator has picked up knowledge imparted in the presentation prior to the group exercise.

The use of appreciative methods, then, appears to preclude the direct challenging of participants' knowledge-claims. Working within the terms of the discourse of appreciation, the researcher-consultant has to present any challenges in an oblique, indirect way and this has implications for the reception of those challenges by participants, as in the next example from workshop 2b. Here all the participants have come together again after the final group exercise and have been asked by Niels to describe a technique they have learned at the workshop that they will take back to their workplace and to say how they will go about trying to apply it in practice in their workplace. One participant, Jan, volunteers and proceeds to give a summary of the discussions in his group. This is followed by a comment by Niels, further

statements by the others and responses by Niels and ultimately a closing statement from Niels:

Niels: Good, thank you (P). And if I may say to you others. Tell us what's on your own mind. You don't have to give us a fine summary from your group as Jan has done.

Marianne: This is also a summary of what we have discussed in the group. Of what we have learned today. We were very much in agreement. We will prepare better. Design the meeting, spar with colleagues. Get input from others. We agreed on the techniques

Niels: Like how one should tackle the situation, you're thinking. Thank you. One more thing from someone else, please?

Participant: Be precise about why we are meeting, a round, deliberation. And the framework.

Niels: Super. That's a lot of things there. Why are we meeting, three techniques, and the framework too, Super. That's fine. That's good. We don't need to hear from all of you, all of the groups. Eh. Let's say that's fine now. We've heard some of things you're going to take away with you, what you are going to use. That rounds the day off for today [Niels then concludes the workshop by giving practical information about the next two workshops]

[Niels: Godt tak (P) Og hvis jeg må sige til jer andre. Fortæl os hvad I har på jeres eget hjerte. I behøver ikke give et udmærket referat fra gruppen som Jan har gjort.

Marianne: Det er også en opsamling af hvad vi har diskuteret i gruppen. Om hvad vi har lært i dag. Vi var meget enige. Vi skal forberede os bedre; designe mødet, sparre med kollegaer; få input fra andre. Vi var enige i teknikkerne.

Niels: som hvordan man skal takle en situation, du tænker. Tak En enkel ting fra I andre ja.

Deltager: Præciser hvorfor vi er på møde, runden, summen. Og så rammen

Niels: Super. Der er rigtig mange ting der. Altså hvorfor man er på møde, tre teknikker og så rammen også. Super

Niels: Det er fint. Det er godt. Vi behøver ikke at høre mere fra jer alle sammen, alle grupper. Eh Lad os sige at det er godt. Vi har hørt hvad I vil tage med jer, hvad I vil bruge. Em Det runder dagen af for i dag]

In the above, Niels first gives an appreciative, affirmative comment – “Good, thank you” – before putting forward the suggestion that the others could do it in a different way from Jan. There is no direct criticism of Jan's contribution, and indeed the contribution is given the favourable epithet “good”. At the same time, the expression “tell us what you have on your mind” could be taken to imply that Jan had not told them what was on his own mind and that he ought to have done so. The mildness of the implied criticism, though, is supported by the verb “you don't have to”; a stronger criticism would have contained, for example, the modal verbs of obligation you “ought to” or you “should” rather than “you don't need to”. The appreciative method, then, can be said to be articulated as a genre (rather than a 'discourse') that defines the activity regulated by Niels as one in which confirmations of participants' qualities are stressed, direct criticisms excluded and indirect ones implicit and mild. Thus contributions which conflict with the aims of the course exercises as defined by Niels go largely unchallenged. The result is that further conflicting contributions may be made, as in the above case whereby the next two contributions also present summaries of the group discussions instead of individual contributions based on what they have “on their mind”. Niels' strategy is to continue within the genre of appreciation with the supportive remarks “that's fine, that's good” but to close the discussion, “we don't need to hear more from the

other groups". The only way of stopping the breach with his desired way of doing things without breaking with the appreciative genre is to exercise his authority as workshop teacher and bring the session to the end.

A key question, then, with respect to the implications for the communication of research-based knowledge is how to cope best with the tension between course organiser-control and the dialogic moments where participants have the freedom to act within the delimitations of the group exercise. Following the session in which participants presented summaries of group discussions rather than saying what "they had on their minds", Niels expressed frustration to me, stating that such summaries were a waste of time and that was why he ended the session; within the terms of the genre of appreciation, he was not able to launch a direct challenge. Thus participants may not have learned that their contributions were inappropriate and thus may not have learned how to give appropriate contributions. This is a problem within the terms of the project, as the aim of the project is to further learning by participants with respect to practices. Thus the appreciative approach may here work to impede learning although in general it is an approach that works to further learning through affirming, and thus encouraging, people's own understandings .

Niels and Anna discussed the incident where the meeting-leader did not perform in a way that indicated appropriate techniques for practice and considered whether to change the exercise so that one of them became the meeting leader; in this way, they would be able to guarantee that the exercise was carried out in line with their principles for practice. But were they to do this, the balance would shift away from participant agency and towards teacher-control, compromising the principle of "learning by doing".

While the genre of appreciation restricts possibilities for the regulation of participants, a degree of teacher-control was still exercised through the application of a number of social technologies. A key technology was the regulation of time, whereby strict time-keeping contributed to the creation of a framework for dialogue that was tightly regulated by the researchers-consultants. It was partly through the regulation of time that Niels and Anna exercised and asserted their authority and positioned themselves as teachers/trainers in control of a learning situation. Thus they stated clearly to participants how long they had for each group exercise in which the participants engaged actively, and any attempts to deviate from the timetable were cracked down upon, as in the following example:

Arne: We start again in 7 minutes
Anna: No, 4 minutes
Arne: Ok.
Arne: Vi starter igen om 7 minutter.
Anna: Nej, 4 minutter.
Arne: Ok

The strict time-keeping by Niels and Anna was a constitutive dimension of the workshop as a teaching form that is culturally recognised and institutionally established – a teaching form that combines teacher-presentations and group work by participants. As a teaching form, it is expected that the participants acquire some form of knowledge not purely through teacher-presentations but through their own active participation in which they draw on their existing knowledge qua their experiences of practice. But there is no explicit acknowledgement by Niels or Anna that participants are not just the recipients of knowledge-claims put forward in Niels' and Anna's presentations but are also harnessing their own existing knowledge both in responses to the presentations and, even more so, in the group work. The workshop is structured so that such an interaction takes place but it is not acknowledged explicitly. This may reinforce Niels' and Anna's authority as teachers in charge of the training context. Now I

turn to the issue of what forms of knowledge are communicated and how knowledge-claims are supported.

Niels and Anna present their background and the course itself as based on research. They introduce themselves in the following way:

We come from XX which is a research institution which deals with research that is directed towards development/change in different organisations and social contexts. This is a research project with a development dimension (Translation)

[Vi kommer fra XX som er en forskningsinstitution som beskæftiger sig med forskning der retter sig mod udvikling/forandring i forskellige organisationer og sociale kontekster; det her er et forskningsprojekt med en udviklingsdimension (Danish)].

However, throughout the course, neither Niels nor Anna refers to the status of the course as research nor to the research-based nature of the knowledge they present. Several times, Anna presents their knowledge as experience-based, stating for example, “what we have experienced other places is...” [“det vi har oplevet andre steder er...”] (workshop 1b) or “what we have learned elsewhere is...” (workshop 1b) “[det vi oplever flere steder er].”, “we could see from our earlier experience” (“vi kunne se fra vores tidligere erfaring”) or “on the basis of our experience” (“ud fra vores erfaring med andre kursusforløb”). Anna always refers to what “we” experience or “our” experience rather than her own personal experience. It is interesting in relation to the social function and status of research that neither Anna nor Niels supported their knowledge-claims during the course by reference to the roots of the knowledge-claims in research. What is primary is the relevance of the knowledge for practice, hence Anna's repeated references to the experience-based character of her knowledge-claims: she knows what she is talking about because she has experienced it before; the use of “we” rather than “I” indicates that this is not “just” a subjective experience but a product of her work with Niels. This assumption that an anchoring in experience has more authority than an anchoring in research echoes, of course, the understanding of other practice-oriented researcher-consultants. Pearce and Pearce (2001), for instance, point out that “the participants in the projects don't care about their theoretical grounding. They are more interested in the feasibility and cost, the potential to achieve demonstrable outcomes and [our] credentials as practitioners” (2001: 106).¹⁰

The question is whether Niels and Anna ought to stress more the roots of their claims in research. What would be the point of that? One reason would be to give their points more authority. But generally it seemed as if their knowledge-claims were accepted as legitimate by the participants. There were a few cases, though, in which the legitimacy of their claims were challenged. For example, when Niels stated in his introductory talk at Workshop 1a that meetings often lack energy and participants are often tired and lacklustre, a participant broke into the talk with the following comment: “the participants in my meetings do not arrive tired” (“deltagerne på mine møder møder jo ikke trætte op”). And another participant (also broke into the talk with the critical comment that there was nothing new in what Niels was saying (“there's nothing new in this”)/”der er ikke noget nyt i det her”):

Arne: For me there isn't so much new

Niels: Well, super

Arne: I hope something will come up that I can use.

10 Obviously, the converse arises with respect to the classical response of traditional academia: often here claims to theory on the part of practical theorists are met with scepticism by traditionalists and practice-oriented research treated with derision as ungrounded in theory (see eg Pearce and Pearce 2001)

Niels: I'm sure there will.¹¹

[Danish: Arne: For mig er der ikke så meget nyt.

Niels: Super godt.

Arne: Jeg håber at der kommer noget jeg kan bruge.

Niels: Det er jeg sikker på at der gør] [Workshop 1a]

Another challenge took place in the form of a questioning of the depiction of current conditions which Niels was in the process of giving in a 30 minute presentation in workshop 2b:

Marie: You paint a picture [...] that one should humour to employees. They just have to do their job. They do get 30,000 kroner a month. You draw a picture I can get tired of. [+ something partly inaudible about metal fatigue]

Niels: I hear and understand your metal fatigue thoughts.

Comment from other participant: It isn't necessarily humouring.

[Marie: Du tegner et billede af [...] at man skal lefle for medarbejderne. De skal bare gøre deres job. De får jo 30,000 kroner om måned. Du laver et billede jeg kan være træt af. [+noget om metaltræthed]

Niels: Jeg hører og forstår dine metaltanker

All these instances can be analysed as struggles or as negotiations between different knowledge-claims or constructions of relevant knowledge.

Although Niels and Anna never use the term “dialogue”, the course can be said to contain dialogic features in that the participants are able and encouraged to act freely in the group exercises within the boundaries set by the stated purpose of the exercise and the instructions given by Niels or Anna. Thus we can talk about some kind of negotiation of knowledge in the sense that input from Niels and Anna's presentations are designed to shape the exercises but the participants need not reproduce the knowledge communicated in the presentations but can draw on other knowledge resources than those of the presentations. And what is communicated from the presentations obviously is a function of the participants' interpretations. The participants' role-playing in the exercises can then be seen as a product of their interpretation of the knowledge-claims put forward in the presentations combined with their understandings of own experiences with meetings in their everyday work practices. Another aspect of the course which is organised dialogically is the comments which participants also make following each role-playing session. In their comments, the participants name a range of techniques which can be used to improve their meeting-management; indeed the list of techniques which is produced is created by the participants in their comments and not by Niels and Anna. Niels and Anna's input takes the form of reformulations of some of the comments where they re-phrase a comment in words which they present as a fitting description of a technique.

To Sum Up

This paper represents work-in-process that sketches out ongoing research into how “dialogue” and “the negotiation of knowledges” are enacted through the discursive practices of different participants in processes of knowledge production and communication in a practice-oriented research and development consultancy. The overall research project aims,

11 All citations have been translated by the author from the Danish.

through a series of case-studies, to produce empirically-grounded insights into different constructions of dialogue in different contexts. The paper does not present a finished set of analyses but rather initial analytical steps towards analysis containing a number of analytical threads that point to the complexity of knowledge production and communication when conceived as interactive by researchers/participants.

One aspect underpinning the complexity is the tension between control/regulation by the researcher-consultant, on the one hand, and participant agency/freedom of action, on the other. I am in the process of exploring this tension by focusing on moments of “crisis” where participants, in some way, challenge or contest the knowledge claims of researchers.

One question of interest is whether a challenge can be fruitfully understood as a question of degree such that more moderate challenges can be understood as “negotiations”. With respect to this, an attempt will be made to produce a more nuanced, more empirically sensitive, analysis of “negotiation” than that produced in audience research, where, in the tradition of encoding/decoding theory, a negotiated reading is defined as the partial acceptance of the encoded discourse while an oppositional or resistant reading is viewed as the total rejection of the encoded discourse (see eg Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). Discourse analysis, including the concept of hybrid discourse arising through hegemonic struggles, and also the notions of tension and tensionality developed by Pearce and Pearce 2004 and key philosophers of dialogue (see Stewart Zediker and Black 2004), can be enlisted here. Another question to be pursued is how power works through the operation of social technologies in the tension between researcher control/regulation and participant agency/freedom of action and the role of “dialogic” moments in relation to that tension. And finally, there will be further exploration of the nature of different knowledge forms and the relational production and contestation of knowledge(s) through the interplay or “negotiation” between different knowledge forms.

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