

## Arts-based co-production in participatory research

harnessing creativity in the tension between process and product

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## research

# Arts-based co-production in participatory research: harnessing creativity in the tension between process and product

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**Background:** In participatory research approaches, co-researchers and university researchers aim to co-produce and disseminate knowledge across difference in order to contribute to social and practice change as well as research. The approaches often employ arts-based research methods to elicit experiential, embodied, affective, aesthetic ways of knowing. The use of arts-based research in co-production in participatory research is embedded in a contested discursive terrain. Here, it is embroiled in political struggles for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts.

**Aims and objectives:** The aim is to present and illustrate the use of a theoretical framework for analysing the complexities of co-production in the nexus between arts and research – with a focus on the overarching tension between cultivating the collaborative, creative process and producing specific research results. The article maps out the contested discursive terrain of arts-based co-production, and illustrates the use of the theoretical framework in analysis of a participatory research project about dance for people with Parkinson's disease and their spouses.

**Methods:** The theoretical framework combines Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, Foucault's theory of power/knowledge and discourse, Wetherell's theory of affect and emotion, and work in arts-based research on embodied, affective, aesthetic knowing.

**Results:** The analysis shows *how* arts-based processes of co-production elicit embodied, emotional, aesthetic knowing and with *what* consequences for the research-based knowledge and other outputs generated.

**Discussion and conclusions:** Trying to contribute to both research and practice entails navigating in a discursive terrain in which criteria for judging results, outputs and impact are often defined across conflicting discourses.

**Key words** arts-based research • co-production • embodied • affective • aesthetic knowing • participatory research

### Key messages

- There is a dearth of detailed analyses of the potentials and challenges arising in arts-based co-production.
- The article offers a theoretical framework for analysing the tension between cultivating collaborative, creative processes and generating specific results.
- It explores how arts-based co-production elicits embodied, emotional, aesthetic knowing, and with what consequences for the results.

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## Introduction

Research which can be broadly categorised as ‘participatory’ has become widespread internationally in diverse fields of research and social practice. It encompasses a wide range of heterogeneous approaches, including (but not restricted to) participatory action research (PAR), community-based participatory research (CBPR), arts-based research (ABR), inclusive research (IR) (with people with disabilities), feminist ethics of care methodologies, collaborative action research (CAR) and decolonising/indigenous methodologies (for example, [Phillips et al, 2013](#); [Edwards and Brannelly, 2017](#)). Across the heterogeneous approaches, ‘co-production’ is a pivotal principle. The idea is that people with lived experience of the research topic and university researchers ‘co-produce’ knowledge together in specially designed fora (for example, [Wilson et al, 2018](#); [Groot et al, 2019](#); [MacFarlane and Roche, 2019](#)).

Participatory research approaches share the ideal of democratising knowledge production on the basis of an epistemology that builds on an expanded understanding of *what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts*. Democratising knowledge production consists in creating space for the participation of people with lived experience of the research topic, the articulation of multiple knowledge forms, and the co-production of new knowledge across those multiple knowledge forms (for example, [Phillips, 2011](#); [Edwards and Brannelly, 2017](#)). This entails that multiple social actors are recognised and valued as legitimate ‘knowers’, the authorised knowledge of academia is stripped of its monopoly on truth, and multiple ways of knowing are categorised as legitimate and valuable. In particular, the experiential, embodied knowledge of people with lived experience of the topic – for instance, users of social and health care – is recognised as a form of expert knowledge ([Abma et al, 2009](#); [MacFarlane and Roche, 2019](#)). According to participatory researchers, the participation of people with relevant lived experience as co-researchers in the co-production of knowledge has the potential to raise the relevance and quality of the knowledge generated. In so doing, it may reduce the gap between research and practice – the so-called ‘research-to-practice gap’ ([Metz et al, 2019](#)), ‘translation gap’ ([Clarke et al, 2019](#)), or ‘relevance gap’ ([Gillard et al, 2012](#)) – and, consequently, contribute to meaningful social and practice transformation as well as to the research field.

Arts-based research (ABR) is often employed in participatory research on the grounds that it is well-suited to eliciting embodied, aesthetic and emotional/affective ways of knowing in the research process – ‘arts-based research as process’ – and/or in the dissemination of results in an artistic format – ‘arts-based research as product’ (Boydell et al, 2012: 3). Boydell et al (2016: 690) note that the researchers, artists and trainees they interviewed highlighted that ABR ‘brings the embodied, the sensuous and the emotional to the forefront’. More generally across the literature, many researchers argue that personal stories of illness experiences, told in the research process and in the artistic dissemination of results, move academic researchers, co-researchers, and audiences emotionally, creating ‘an empathetic participation in the lives of others’ (Kukkonen and Cooper, 2017: 296).

In the literature on participatory research, it is asserted that, although there is some empirical support for the distinctive contribution of co-production and ABR, there is a dearth of detailed analyses of the potentials and challenges of creative processes of co-production (Boydell et al, 2012; Flinders et al, 2016; Metz et al, 2019). In this article, we present and illustrate the use of a theoretical framework for analysing the complexities of co-production in the nexus between arts and research where creative processes are harnessed to produce specific research outputs. Our analysis homes in on *how* arts-based processes of co-production elicit embodied, emotional, aesthetic knowing and with *what* consequences for the research-based knowledge and other outputs generated.

It has also been noted in the literature that the use of ABR in co-production is undertheorised (Boydell et al, 2012; 2016; Flinders et al, 2016). Our theoretical framework theorises the complexities of arts-based co-production in terms of *tensions*. Traditionally, participatory research using ABR has ranked low and evidence-based, positivist approaches have ranked high in knowledge hierarchies in academia and social and health policy (for example, Abma et al, 2009; Filipe et al, 2017). Despite the increasing traction of the ideal of democratising knowledge production and policy lip-service to participatory approaches, traditional knowledge hierarchies still dominate in academia and social and health policy in the current sociopolitical conjuncture (Flinders et al, 2016; Locock and Boaz, 2019). Consequently, the use of ABR in co-production is embedded in a contested discursive terrain where it is embroiled in political struggles for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts (Boydell et al, 2016). Tensions arise in co-production as knowledge is negotiated to varying extents within and across different discursive understandings of co-production. When art meets research in arts-based co-production, these tensions come into play in the overarching tension between cultivating the collaborative, creative process *and* producing specific research results. In this article, we illustrate our framework for theorising ABR in terms of tensions by applying it in analysis of collaborative storytelling workshops in a participatory research project about dance for people with Parkinson’s disease and their spouses.

First, we briefly map the contested discursive terrain in which arts-based co-production in participatory research is embedded and engages in struggles for legitimacy. Then we outline the research design and theoretical framework and present the analysis. To conclude the article, we summarise the insights gained from applying the framework and reflect on their implications for the standing of arts-based co-production in the struggle for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts.

## A brief mapping of the contested discursive terrain

In current struggles for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts in social and health research and policy, a democratic, dialogic discourse valuing processes of co-production as spaces for democratising knowledge is often at odds not only with the traditional, positivist scientific discourse but also with a technocratic discourse (Madden and Speed, 2017). This technocratic discourse has neoliberal elements and is a central discourse in the modus 2 wave of research (Nowotny et al, 2001) which is closely tied to the political governance model ‘collaborative governance’ (Bennett and Brunner, 2020). Collaborative governance supports co-production across public institutions, private and third sector organisations and civil society in order to produce innovative welfare solutions and economic growth. The technocratic, modus 2 discourse construes co-production along instrumental lines as a means to solve predefined problems and obtain results furthering preset outcomes of innovation and economic growth (Metz et al, 2019). Within this discourse, co-production is frequently subject to ‘narrow technocratic co-option’ and depoliticised as a source of information about personal experiences supplementing individual consumer choice (Madden and Speed, 2017: 6).

In contrast, in the democratic, dialogic discourse, co-production is enacted as emergent, relational practices of mutual learning building on personal relationships of mutual caring (Groot et al, 2019). Here, nurturing meaningful relationships of mutual caring in the process itself is given priority in order to honour principles of relational ethics and provide a strong foundation for dialogic learning across difference (Nicholas et al, 2019; Phillips et al, 2021b).

In co-production in current social and healthcare research policy and practice, the technocratic discourse is often combined with a positivist, scientific discourse. Research based on positivist criteria for generating ‘evidence’ is often favoured as it is assumed that, by measuring effects, effectivity and productivity, it can deliver concrete results that achieve performance goals in the global knowledge economy (Paylor and McKevitt, 2019: 3). To meet the standards of rigour set by evidence-based policy designed to further innovation and economic growth, co-production must demonstrate ‘a strict internal validity represented by the ability researchers have to control data, subjects and context’ (Smith-Merry, 2020: 308). In contrast, *the relinquishment of full control* is a cornerstone of co-production in the democratic, dialogic discourse, based as it is on an expanded, democratic understanding of knowledge. Since co-production is construed in the democratic, dialogic discourse as emergent, relational practices, processes can never be fully controlled by the university researchers. Moreover, artistic, creative expression in ABR is obviously always an emergent, open-ended process. As one of the artists interviewed by Boydell (2016: 688) stated, “work in the arts allows an unfolding, so you end up in places you never thought”.

Therefore, from the perspective of conventional research and evidence-based policy, the processes of participatory research and ABR lack rigour and, consequently, the results lack legitimacy. However, in the struggle for legitimacy, research combining the technocratic and the positivist discourses is subject to counterattack: from within the terms of the democratic, dialogic discourse, critics of technocratic and positivist methods of co-production point out that such methods often lead to the treatment of service users’ experiential knowledge as a tokenistic add-on and hence to the reproduction of existing knowledge hierarchies (Gillard et al, 2012; Metz et al, 2019).

**Table 1: The contested discursive terrain of arts-based co-production**

Discourses Key features	Positivist scientific discourse	Technocratic modus 2 discourse	Democratic, dialogic discourse
Understanding of research process	standardised procedure based on researcher's full ontrol of data, subjects and context	"co-production" construed instrumentally as means to solve pre-defined problems and pre-set outcomes	"co-production" construed as emergent, relational practices of mutual learning based on researcher's relinquishment of full control
Status of experiential knowledge	not recognized as expert knowledge that can form the basis for evidence	risk of being tokenistic add-on	actively cultivated through arts-based research methods and relations of mutual caring
Intended outcomes (re research and practice)	measurable, quantifiable research results which live up to scientific standards of rigour; evidence-based practice effects	socially robust and useful research results; practice innovation and economic growth	new knowledge which destabilizes knowledge hierarchy; transformative social and practice change and community empowerment

In their editorial for a special issue on co-creative approaches to knowledge production and implementation in this journal, [Metz et al \(2019: 336\)](#) point out that many of the contributions tend to frame co-creative approaches, along technocratic, managerial lines, as a means through which *new* participants can take part in *existing* processes as opposed to as a platform for social and practice transformation. For a summary of the main features of the three discourses, see [Table 1](#).

In this article, we agree that technocratic, neoliberal approaches and positivist, scientific approaches (both when separate and combined) tend to reproduce traditional knowledge hierarchies, and that technocratic approaches over-instrumentalise co-production as a means of problem solving to meet preset goals. In our project, we theorise co-production within the terms of the democratic, dialogic discourse as complex relational practices in which relationships of mutual caring are nurtured and knowledge is co-produced across difference. At the same time, our starting point is that, even in projects in which researchers deliberately try to avoid the technocratic co-optation of creative processes and positivist validity criteria, arts-based co-production is never a smooth, straightforward process. Tensions arise in struggles for legitimacy in the contested discursive terrain in which all collaborative projects navigate. The tensions emerge – and are productive in – the complex relational practices of co-production across different understandings of the research process, knowledge and outcomes. In the next section, we present our theoretical framework for analysing these tensions, which we then apply in analysis of the enactment of co-production in the participatory project on Parkinson's dance.

## Theoretical framework for analysing the tensions in creative processes of co-production

To construct our theoretical approach, we draw on Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, in which all communication is construed as 'dialogue' in the sense that meaning is produced relationally in the tension between multiple – and often contradictory and opposing – *voices* ([Bakhtin, 1981; 1984; 1986](#)). The meanings of objects (for example,

‘co-production’) and selves (for example, ‘co-researchers’, ‘university researchers’ and the participatory project ‘we’) emerge in the negotiation of meanings in social interaction in which the participants address each other’s voices. In Bakhtin’s understanding, ‘voices’ are both the media for the uttered speech of embodied persons and discourses, ideologies, perspectives or themes (Bakhtin, 1981). An individual person articulates multiple voices; the self is ‘multi-voiced’. People simultaneously address the voices of addressees in the conversation and the voices of others who are not physically present (Bakhtin, 1984; 1986). In addressing others in dialogue, people do not just reproduce the voices of others but *rework* them to create multi-voiced selves and hybrid knowledge. They do this in a process of *re-accentuation*, whereby they invest others’ perspectives with their own ‘accents’, making them their own (Bakhtin, 1984).

Bakhtin asserts that the unity that emerges in meaning-making is the tensional product of two competing tendencies, the centripetal tendency towards unity and the centrifugal tendency towards difference (Bakhtin, 1981). In the interplay between voices, meanings are formed but, as a result of the play of difference across voices, those meanings are polyphonic/multi-voiced, tension-ridden and unstable. Utterances, then, are open to new interpretations through socioculturally and temporally situated negotiations of meaning and are therefore ‘unfinalisable’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 118–119). Following Bakhtin, we understand ‘co-production’, ‘(co)-researchers’ and the participatory project ‘we’ as tensional, unstable, unfinalisable products of situated negotiations of meaning across voices, and hence as being in a constant process of *relational becoming* throughout the research process. Applying this point as both an ethical and methodological principle means creating space for the voices of others, understood as the dynamic, unfinalisable products of situated, relational practices – not the stable, authentic expressions of autonomous selves (Chadwick, 2021).

In our approach, we draw too on Wetherell’s theory of affect and emotion (Wetherell, 2012) and theorisation of ‘embodiment’ in ABR in order to conceptualise embodied, affective and aesthetic knowing, including visceral feelings of joy and togetherness. Wetherell’s theory offers an understanding of emotions as situated social activities which are relational, dialogic and performative: emotions *create* objects and identities by being ‘signified, negotiated and evaluated in the inter-subjective moment’ (Wetherell, 2012: 74). ABR provides insight into the embodied, affective, aesthetic dimensions of knowledge production and, in particular, insight into how collaborative engagement in arts fosters reflexivity and empathy, and thereby stimulates multiple ways of embodied knowing, including aesthetic and kinesthetic knowing (Leavy, 2019: 5). Specifically, we draw on Ellingson’s understanding of embodiment which is in line with our Bakhtinian ontology of relational becoming (Ellingson, 2017). Along new materialist lines, Ellingson construes embodiment as in a constant state of becoming – never fixed or finalised – and as simultaneously material and discursive: the material self is constructed through interaction with other bodies and material objects, and we experience our bodies through (available) discourses which ascribe specific meanings to the body (Ellingson, 2017: 19).

To theorise negotiations of knowledge and participant-identities in the context of struggles for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts, our approach incorporates Foucault’s theory of discourse and power/knowledge, which asserts that knowledge and identities come into being in historically contingent discourses which exclude or marginalise other ways of being, knowing and doing (Foucault, 1972; 1977; 1980). We construe voices as discourses



which each construct a particular form of knowledge and particular identities. In the coming into being of the ‘we’ of participatory research, power is in play as certain voices, and therefore certain knowledge forms and identities, dominate, and others are marginalised.

By focusing on power in co-production, our approach draws on the growing body of research that critically and reflexively examines power dynamics in co-production (for example, Phillips et al, 2013; Flinders et al, 2016; Olesen and Nordentoft, 2018; Groot et al, 2019). At the same time, we aim with our approach to offer a distinctive contribution to this body of research by theorising co-production as complex relational practices *emergent* in the inexorable play of power across voices. By both enabling and constraining the articulation of different knowledges and participant-identities, power dynamics in participatory research shape the conduct of university researchers and co-researchers. Thus, power is present in the positions it is possible for project participants – co-researchers and university researchers – to occupy in the research process (Phillips et al, 2021a).

In co-production, then – according to our approach’s Foucauldian perspective – there is a *heightened* negotiation of knowledge and identities across voices, but those processes of negotiation are inexorably infused with power. Democratising knowledge production can never produce a level playing field in which all forms of knowledge and all knowers are equal. Tensions inevitably arise in the conflict between the championing of multiple ways of knowing *and* the inexorable workings of power/knowledge in which, in the negotiation of knowledge across voices, certain forms of knowledge and identities are privileged.

In this article, we focus on a tension that arises specifically with the use of ABR in co-production – in the nexus between arts and research. This is a tension between cultivating the collaborative creative process using ABR *and* generating specific research-based knowledge-claims and products. As noted earlier, to further dialogic learning across multiple ways of knowing, researchers relinquish full control over the process. It is precisely the capacity of ABR to cultivate creative, emergent-opened processes which makes it well-suited for co-production. However, it is also this capacity that makes it difficult to generate research results in the form of specific, clearly delineated research-based knowledge-claims and material outputs. This creates a tension between process and product which we explore in our analysis of collaborative storytelling workshops in the participatory research project on Parkinson’s dance.

## Research design

This article addresses one of two main research questions in the research project: *What possibilities and challenges arise in the tensions in co-production in participatory research?* It is one of several publications addressing this question (see Phillips et al, 2021a; 2021b). See Christensen-Strynø et al (2021; 2022a; 2022b) and Frølund et al (2021) for publications addressing the other research question: *what do people with Parkinson’s disease and their spouses experience as the role of Parkinson’s dance in their everyday lives by virtue of specific embodied, sensory and aesthetic experiences?*

The project consists of three phases. The research design is outlined in Figure 1.

In phase 1, the university researchers conducted a six-month-long ethnographic study, in which they participated actively in five different weekly dance classes for



Figure 1: Research design

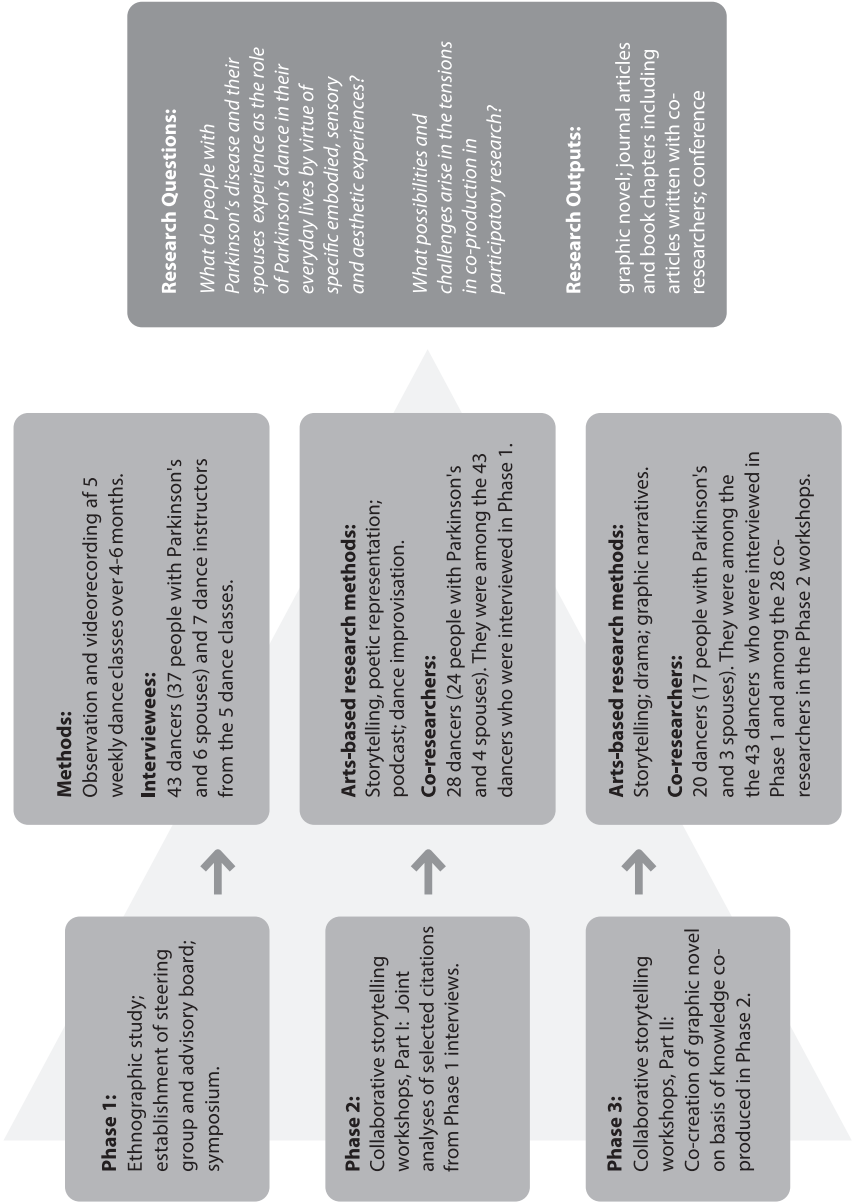


Table 2: Collaborative storytelling workshops

WORKSHOP	ACTIVITY AND ARTS-BASED METHOD*
	* In all the workshops, Lisbeth was the lead facilitator, and either Louise or Maria was the assistant facilitator.
<b>PHASE 2</b>	
<b>Workshop 1</b> Theme: <i>The role of dance and music</i>	Each participant reads selected citations from Phase 1 interviews with people from other dance classes and writes postcards taking their starting-point in the question <i>What made the biggest impression on you when you read the citations?</i> Each group then writes haiku poems based on their reflections on the postcards.
<b>Workshop 2</b> Theme: <i>Identities, social relations and different treatments</i>	Each participant reads selected citations from Phase 1 interviews with people from other dance classes. Based on the question " <i>what made the biggest impression on you?</i> " each participant writes down his/her impressions and associations in the light of their dance experiences and life with Parkinson's. Each participant constructs a persona, and each group makes a podcast radio panel in which the different personaer take part as experts.
<b>Workshop 3</b> Theme: <i>Body, time, aesthetics and culture</i>	We start with collective movements in a circle. We listen to two pieces of music from the playlist of special requests. Each group discusses experiences on the basis of the questions: <i>What do you feel when listening and moving to the different pieces of music? How do you experience time in the music and within yourselves? What music preferences do you have, and how do they relate to your experience of the music we listened to today?</i> The two facilitators read aloud selected citations from the interviews. Each participant writes down keywords, phrases or sentences that move them. Each group devises and performs a dance improvisation that illustrates the keyword, phrase or sentence each participant has selected. They give the dance improvisation a title.
<b>PHASE 3</b>	
<b>Workshop 4</b> Development of characters for graphic novel.	Each group develops a character, describes the character physically and mentally, and devises and performs a short dramatic improvisation showing the main features of the character. As inspiration, they draw on material that was co-created in workshops 1, 2 and 3.
<b>Workshop 5</b> Development of storylines for the graphic novel.	Each group is given a scene based on stories submitted by some of the participants in advance of the workshop. The group talks briefly about how the scene and its characters relate to each other, distributes characters to each group member, brainstorms about the scene and enacts it. The enactment is videorecorded and the group reflects on what worked well and not so well, and then replays the scene.

people with Parkinson's disease and their spouses in Copenhagen and environs, and carried out qualitative interviews with 43 dancers from the five weekly dance classes and their seven dance teachers. The seven dance teachers joined the project as bridge builders, helping the university researchers to establish relationships with the dancers and support the collaborative research process. We invited the dancers and dance teachers to join the steering group which was designed as a site for collaborative decision making about project activities. Seventeen of the 43 dancers and all seven dance teachers joined.

In phases 2 and 3, we invited the 43 dancers from phase 1 to participate as co-researchers in a series of collaborative storytelling workshops which represented

the project's main sites for the co-production of knowledge. In both phases, the co-production of knowledge took place through storytelling on the basis of a central principle of narrative inquiry: namely, that we can be emotionally moved by, and learn from, each other by telling and listening to stories which resonate with each other in different ways (for example, [Bochner and Ellis, 2016](#)). To elicit embodied affective, aesthetic knowing across multiple modalities, we used arts-based research methods in the workshops' storytelling exercises (for example, [Boydell et al, 2012](#); [Foster, 2016](#); [Leavy, 2019](#)). For a description of the workshop exercises and the arts-based methods used, see [Table 2](#).

In the phase 2 workshops, the co-researchers analysed the material from phase 1 in creative exercises using the ABR methods of collaborative writing as inquiry (postcards and haiku poems), podcasts and dance improvisation. This material consisted of citations (extracts) from the interviews which the university researchers had selected on the basis of a preliminary analysis. The point of using interview citations was to anchor the co-production of knowledge in the workshops in the co-researchers' own experiences of Parkinson's dance. Of the 43 dancers, 28 (24 people with Parkinson's and four spouses) participated as co-researchers in the phase 2 workshops. There were three phase 2 workshops (with 3–6 participants in each) which were repeated for each of the five dance classes (with the exception of one workshop where two dance classes were merged as one class was very small). To bring in the voices of others and to ensure anonymity, the interview citations were from other classes, not from the class to which the participants in the workshop in question belonged.

The workshops in phase 3 built on the knowledge that was co-produced in the phase 2 workshops and were designed to co-create a graphic novel ([Frølund et al, 2021](#)) (see [Figure 1](#)).

## Analysing the tensions in the nexus between arts and research

To explore the overarching tension between cultivating the collaborative, creative process and producing specific research results, we concentrate on the following two questions in analysis of transcribed audio-recordings of extracts from phase 2 workshops<sup>1</sup>:

- How does the overarching tension between cultivating the process and producing specific results come into play in the elicitation of embodied, affective, aesthetic knowing in arts-based co-production in a contested discursive terrain? (Example 1)
- How does the overarching tension between cultivating the process and producing specific results come into play in the negotiation of knowledge across voices in a contested discursive terrain? (Example 2)

### *Example 1: Eliciting embodied, affective, aesthetic knowing: the enactment of the process as emergent and open-ended and structured and purposive*

To explore how embodied, affective, aesthetic knowing is elicited in co-production in the nexus between art and research, the first of our two analyses focuses on a transcribed extract from the first phase 2 workshop in which co-researchers – in two

groups of three – collaboratively analysed the meanings of dance and music and, as creative outputs, wrote postcards individually and haiku poems collaboratively in their groups (see Table 2). The extract is from when the two groups of three co-researchers present their haikus to each other and the university researchers, Lisbeth, Louise and Maria, who were, respectively, the main and assisting facilitators. In the analysis, we have divided the extract into a series of short excerpts which we analyse one after the other. In the first of the short excerpts from the extract, the three co-researchers in group 1 read their collaboratively written haikus aloud:

- 1 Lisbeth (main facilitator): Good, as a way of finishing off today's work with the  
2 interview citations and postcards, you've been busy with your haikus. We'd really like  
3 to hear from each group what you've come up with. Who'd like to read theirs out,  
4 you can take it in turns, if you like?  
5 Frederik (group 1): We've done four.  
6 Katrine (group 2): Wow! [laughs]  
7 Frederik: And we've had a break too [laughs]  
8 Maria (assisting facilitator): Luckily it's not a competition.  
9 Katrine: Luckily it's not a competition.  
10 Frederik: Everything's a competition [laughs]. But our first one goes like this:

**I halt and get stuck  
I listen to the music  
And I fly again**

- 11 Katrine: Beautiful, that was really beautiful.  
12 Frederik: Do you want to hear more of them?  
13 Lisbeth: Yes, yes, yes.  
14 Katrine: We've heard you've got four! [laughs].  
15 Frederik: Okay. Here goes:

**The stairs are so steep  
But Søren can climb swiftly  
When the dance is done**

**In my life there is  
Movement to many rhythms  
But also slumber**

- 16 Lisbeth: They're beautiful.  
17 Frederik:

**Spirits are high now  
Dancing gives me happiness  
Almost forget P.**

- 18 Lisbeth: What do you think? Any comments from the other group?  
19 Susanne (group 2): Beautiful.  
20 Katrine: That was very evocative.

- 21 Frederik: It's Carl-Christian who's the master at it.  
22 Carl-Christian (group 1): No, no, no.  
23 Lisbeth: I think they're quirky, there's an essence that's been distilled. Really  
24 moving.  
25 Frederik: Crying's not allowed [laughs].  
26 Lisbeth: I think it's moving.  
27 Svend (group 1): It's a fun way of doing it.  
28 Carl-Christian: It really is. I'd better write them down.  
29 Susanne: Can the rest of us also get what the others have written, please?  
30 Lisbeth: Definitely.

In the above excerpt, the haikus in group 1 are read out by one member, Frederik, who, after he has read them out, singles out Carl-Christian as the “master” which Carl-Christian denies (lines 21–22). Thus, the haikus are presented as the product of group work, with Frederik representing his group and Carl-Christian as a central participant due to his particular skills. The collaborative nature of the exercise is reinforced by the jokey banter between the two groups (lines 5–10). Members of the other group and the main facilitator, Lisbeth, show appreciation for the haikus, referring, in particular, to their emotional force – that they are *very evocative* (line 20) and *moving* (lines 23–24 and 26). One of the group 1 members, Svend, praises the process, stating that the poems were fun to write (line 27). The value of the poems themselves – as opposed to the writing process alone – is signaled and reinforced by Carl-Christian's wish to record and keep them (line 28) and Susanne's request for written copies (line 29). In the next excerpt, group 2 presents their haikus:

- 31 Katrine: Art.  
32 Frederik: Can we hear the next art?  
33 Katrine: Yes.

**Music and laughter  
The roar of waves, rush of wind  
So we yell along**

**Music is moving  
I am giving it my all  
Leaves are falling off**

- 34 Carl-Christian: It's very lyrical, it's really good.

Above, the aesthetic value of the haikus is highlighted with their being called “art” (lines 31–32) and “very lyrical” (line 34). Following this, the facilitator observes that the last haikus incorporate interview citations, and members of group 2 explain this process:

- 35 Maria: And both of these haikus build a bit on some of the interview citations, right?  
36 Katrine: It started with us wanting to say, “give it your all” from one of the interview  
37 citations. And then we thought that it's not just a sunset, it's about shaking things  
38 up. And we talked about how it should be something about trees falling  
39 down so the leaves fell off, right?

40 Susanne: And the wind and that kind of thing.  
41 Lisbeth: Something that had clear consequences, right?  
42 Susanne: And then we thought about the image of water gurgling in the river and  
43 wind whistling through the leaves.  
44 Katrine: Writing the other haiku started with another of the interview citations,  
45 “so we yell along”. And we thought that’s something about life, the joy of life. So we  
46 took “yell”. And we decided to start backwards with the last sentence first “so  
47 we yell along” and we built the other expressions on top of that, right?

In the above, the group represents and appropriates a voice from an interview citation (of a co-researcher not present in the workshop) by re-accentuating the utterance through placing it in a new context – the haiku – in which the group’s own voice is also reproduced. In this way, the group recognises, creates space for, and is inspired by, the voice of the other: “we built the other expressions on top of that”. In the next excerpt, the focus is on the haikus as the products of co-production with an emphasis on the ‘co’ (that is, the collaborative nature of the process):

48 Katrine: It was also fun trying to do it. We were all able to do it.  
49 Lisbeth: I think there’s a great range here, you’re playing with different images.  
50 You don’t know where it’s going to end up but it’s amazing what comes out of  
51 it, right? Great, well, we’ve now got 10 minutes to talk about what you thought  
52 about the storytelling workshop today. And we’re looking forward to the next  
53 one, so d’you have any comments? Did it go too slowly or too fast? We  
54 don’t want to stress you but we do want to get things going, maybe  
55 something unexpected. So how was it? Do you have any suggestions for  
56 what we can do differently next time? We’d really like to hear them.  
57 Carl-Christian: I have to say that, when I was on my way here, I thought, what on  
58 earth is going to come out of this workshop? We were completely unprepared  
59 and hadn’t a clue about what was going to happen [laughter]. And I have to  
60 say, taking that into account, I think I’m a bit proud of what we’ve  
61 done today. I think it’s beautiful. And that must be because the method you’ve  
62 used has been good at getting us there.  
63 Katrine: I also think it’s nice to know what we’re going to do, when you start by  
64 saying we’re going to be doing this and this and this and then return to it later  
65 too, now we’re going to do this and this and this. So we can follow  
66 what’s happening the whole way through, right?  
67 Lisbeth: Yes, thanks.  
68 Svend: I must say it’s been exciting and varied, I’d like to say. And I’m positively  
69 surprised.  
70 Lisbeth: That’s good, I don’t know, of course, if you’d expected the worst. [laughter]  
71 Svend: I had a bit of the same expectation. I thought “what can I actually expect?”  
72 Lisbeth: That’s also because it’s a bit difficult to describe until we’ve actually tried  
73 it, right?

In the above, it is stressed that the process is “fun” (line 48) and inclusive (line 48: “we were all able to do it”). The haikus are presented as products of an emergent open-ended process by Lisbeth (line 50–51: “You don’t know where it’s going to end up but it’s amazing what comes out of it, right?”). This leads to several

comments which also speak to the emergent, open-ended nature of the process – they had not known what to expect and were surprised (lines 57–59; 68–73). These comments also stress the quality of the products as achievements resulting partly from the capacities and efforts of the co-researchers – “I think I’m a bit proud of what we’ve done today” (line 60–61) – and partly from the clear facilitation of the process (lines 63–66).

In the next turn, Katrine stresses the collaborative/*co*-productive nature of the exercise and attributes the group’s active collaboration to the facilitation of Lisbeth:

74 Katrine: And you paved the way for us to say things and involve each other, right?  
75 So we didn’t sit with our own thing but shared it with the others, right?

Lisbeth, then points out that it has played a role that the workshop has been designed to fulfil a specific purpose:

76 Lisbeth: It’s great you got that impression. What you’re spending your valuable  
77 time on obviously has to have a clear purpose. And the purpose is that  
78 we delve deeper into the interview material together. That’s the whole idea. And  
79 that’s why we call you co-researchers. What we’ve been doing today is actually a  
80 kind of joint analysis. And, by using creative methods, you think in a different  
81 way. I think – or I hope – that something else emerges from it being more  
82 lyrical.

83 Katrine: I think you’re taking this really seriously. I like that. We’ve all been very  
84 active, I think.

Here, Lisbeth describes how the workshop’s purpose is to engage collaboratively with the interview material. She highlights the collaborative nature of the exercise by invoking a “we” who “together” have been engaged in “joint analysis” and by foregrounding the identity of the participants as “co-researchers”. She also refers to the creative, artistic nature of the process and how that results in a lyrical way of thinking out of which “something else emerges” (line 81). Katrine then acknowledges the purposive, serious nature of the work AND affirms that they have all engaged collaboratively (lines 83–84). In the next turn, Lisbeth draws a parallel between the collaborative and creative nature of the process and the co-researchers’ Parkinson’s dance class:

85 Lisbeth: And you benefit from each other and what you each say and that releases  
86 energy just like in your dance class. You get energy from the others’ input,  
87 right? But every time’s a bit different.

The assisting facilitator, Maria, refers to a specific instance of dialogic learning in the collaborative, creative process:

88 Maria: It was really interesting to listen to you in the group work. It was fascinating  
89 to hear how spoken language from the interviews is represented in the  
90 haikus and built on in layers. And how the group discussion suddenly developed into  
91 a discussion about how it is to have a personal voice because  
92 some of you wrote your postcard from an ‘I’ – perspective.

93 Katrine: We were just about to write a poem about that but we didn’t get it done.



94 Svend: The haiku poems and postcards which result from today, what are they going  
95 to be used for?

96 Lisbeth: They are going to be used to produce composite stories that will be  
97 presented in a graphic novel that we'll publish in a book together  
98 with citations from the interviews and haikus. We'll be working with two graphic  
99 artists whom we're in the process of hiring.

In the above, it is clear that both the co-researchers and the university researchers engage in a meta-analysis of the creative process of co-production that they have just completed. It is a form of meta-analysis that indicates that, in the process itself, they have been engaged in dialogic learning in the tension between their voices and the voices of others. Here, they re-accentuate their own voices and the voices of others from the interview citations by investing the perspectives of others with their own 'accents' – combining their own lyrical expressions with interview utterances. Thus, it is a creative process in which they have engaged aesthetically as well as analytically with the interview material in order to produce artistic works – the haikus.

In summary, our analysis of the extract (divided into short excerpts) shows that the feeling of contributing as a co-researcher with a concrete product – haikus – shapes understandings and hence is partly constitutive of the process of co-production. The process of creating a concrete artistic work – the haikus – gives a sense of achievement, and the participants show pride in their products, based on collective recognition of the value of art and the quality of the products as particular works of art. The high aesthetic quality of the products is attributed by both the co-researchers and the facilitating university researchers to a tensional, creative process that, at one and the same time, is emergent and open-ended *and* structured and purposive. Thus, the process itself is validated by the quality of the end products. This is a form of validation which not only fits the premises of the democratic, dialogic discourse but also the premises of the technocratic modus 2 discourse, with its instrumental understanding of co-production as a means to achieve preset outcomes.

### *Example 2: Negotiating knowledge across voices: the articulation of multiple knowledge forms and the framing of the workshops in terms of preset goals*

In Example 2, we analyse an extract from the first phase 2 workshop with a different dance class from Example 1. As with Example 1, the co-researchers have collaboratively analysed the meanings of dance and music and, as a creative output, have written postcards; unlike the example above, there was only one group (with three co-researchers) and there were three facilitators (Lisbeth, Louise and Maria). In the extract, the main facilitator, Lisbeth, has invited reflections about the postcard-writing activity they had just completed, asking the co-researchers what had caught their attention in the interview citations they had worked with:

Lisbeth: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about these citations?  
What was it like to read them? What caught your attention?

Edith: The citations seemed to have been chosen a bit selectively or didn't quite cover everything somehow.

Lisbeth: Okay, what was missing?

Edith: The whole aspect of whether they experience direct effects of Parkinson's dance. There was only one who listed all the concrete things he could do [as an effect of Parkinson's dance].

Here, Edith challenges the university researchers' choice of material from within the terms of the positivist, scientific discourse which sees research as a process in which direct effects are measured in order to produce evidence-based knowledge. In articulating this discourse, Edith draws on her background as a university professor in the natural sciences. Then, both the main facilitator, Lisbeth, and the assisting facilitators, Louise and Maria, take turns to explain how each workshop is about a specific theme so that, in the workshops to come, a range of different perspectives will come into play across the different themes:

Louise: Today, we've only worked with two of the themes, the significance of dance and of music. At the same time, these two themes overlap with the themes of the other workshops, but we haven't gone into depth with those other themes, they're for the other workshops.

Maria: But the two themes that this first workshop is about are overarching themes for all the other themes, aren't they? So today we've chosen to stick to the parts of the interviews that are explicitly about dance or music.

Lisbeth: And where we go back to the complexity of the human being as a whole person and all the different life experiences you have, and that shows itself much more in the other themes because the significance of dance and music points in the direction of something concrete. So we thought that that would be a very good place to start because it's not quite as complicated. So yes, it's definitely right that it's a bit more simple.

Lisbeth starts by asking the co-researchers what they thought about the material but, when one of the co-researchers problematises the choice of quotations, Lisbeth, Louise and Maria take over and, in long utterances, explain, and hence justify, their choices with reference to the design of the workshops to obtain preset goals. Thus, there is a tension between the project's explicit aim to create space for the articulation of multiple knowledge forms *and* the university researchers' framing of the workshops in terms of preset project goals. This tension is complex as it arises when the university researchers' choices are contested by a voice articulating the positivist, scientific discourse. By building on her experience as a university researcher and critiquing the project's methodological choices in the voice of positivist science, Edith negotiates her own identity as co-researcher and expert. And, in applying positivist criteria for what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts, Edith's critique challenges the very ideal of democratising knowledge production that is central to the democratic, dialogic discourse on which the preset project goals are based.

## In conclusion

Our aim in this article has been to propose and illustrate a theoretical framework which conceptualises arts-based co-production in participatory research in terms of an overarching tension between cultivating the collaborative, creative process *and* generating research-based knowledge and material outputs.

### *Insights into the tension between process and product*

Applying the theoretical framework generated insights into the complexities of processes of co-production in the overarching tension between process and product in a contested discursive terrain. The analysis in Example 1 shows that co-researchers attributed what they judged to be the high aesthetic quality of the products – haikus – to a creative process that they understood as simultaneously emergent and open-ended *and* structured and purposive. Thus, the quality of the products validated the process. The form of validation belongs not only to the democratic, dialogic discourse but also to the technocratic modus 2 discourse with its instrumental understanding of co-production as a means to obtain preset outcomes. The analysis in Example 2 demonstrates a tension that arose as methodological choices based on the democratic, dialogic discourse were contested by the positivist scientific discourse with its conflicting understandings of the research process, knowledge and outcomes.

### *Implications for struggles for legitimacy*

To close the article, we reflect on the implications of these insights for the standing of arts-based co-production in the struggle for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts. There are two types of results of arts-based co-production. One type is emergent knowing among participants that may lead to lasting personal knowledge. For instance, co-researchers may gain knowledge about relations between their own voices and the voices of others with experience of Parkinson's dance (as articulated in the interview citations). The other type is knowledge and artefacts (haikus) that *go beyond* the workshop participants and may contribute to the (wider) fields of practice and research. Both types result from the embodied and creative relational becoming process and both include embodied, affective, aesthetic knowing. However, it is only the second type that is generally recognised as research results by researchers across epistemologies, including that of the democratic, dialogic discourse as well as the positivist and technocratic discourses.

Through its emergent, open-ended character, ABR furthers the heightened negotiation of knowledge across voices, and thus carries the promise of radically destabilising traditional knowledge hierarchies and generating knowledge that can contribute to research *and* social and practice transformation. Trying to contribute to both research and practice entails navigating in a discursive terrain in which traditional knowledge hierarchies dominate and criteria for judging results, outputs and impact are often defined within and across the positivist scientific discourse and the technocratic modus 2 discourse. In the positivist and technocratic discourses, a clear division is maintained between the research itself ('arts-based research as process' (Boydell et al, 2012: 3)) *and* knowledge dissemination or transfer ('arts-based research as product' (Boydell et al, 2012: 3)). ABR is generally recognised, in these discourses, as

*knowledge transfer* (for example, where the finished results of a conventional qualitative interview study are disseminated to audiences through theatre or installations of poetry and photography).

In our project, we view the co-production *and* the dissemination/communication of research as intertwined processes: knowledge transfer (KT), we argue, is never just a transfer but is itself a site for co-producing knowledge dialogically in which artistic content resonates with readers'/audiences' own lives and moves them emotionally, as [Boydell et al \(2016: 683\)](#) put it. These emotional responses invoke embodied, affective, aesthetic knowing which expands understanding, furthers critical awareness of issues, and spurs action based on that awareness ([Boydell et al, 2012; 2016](#); [Bochner and Ellis, 2016](#); [Foster, 2016](#)). We have used ABR in our project in two sites for *research* – the co-production of knowledge across co-researchers' voices and the voices of others in the collaborative storytelling workshops *and* the co-production of knowledge through co-produced artefacts that resonate with audiences'/readers' lives (for example, the haikus and graphic novel). This use of arts-based research methods in the research process itself (as opposed to its use in knowledge dissemination/transfer) is often not recognised *as* valid research within the positivist and technocratic discourses, and therefore is much more subject to contestation in struggles for legitimacy revolving around what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts.

Moreover, the very strength of ABR – its capacity to elicit multi-voiced, embodied, affective and aesthetic knowing – is also what makes it difficult to generate clear-cut research results in the form of specific, clearly delineated knowledge claims that can contribute to research and practice. As an artist-researcher in Boydell et al's interview study asserts, "you can control meaning making much more precisely in well-written conventional language, propositional discourse, than you can in an artistic piece" ([Boydell et al, 2016: 688](#)). Hence, arts-based co-production is prone to criticism for not living up to a central criterion for *all research*, and not just for not living up to criteria based on the positivist and technocratic discourses.

A line for future research could be to explore how struggles for legitimacy are played out when results are communicated in co-produced artistic modalities. For instance, what happens when a conference is designed as a forum not only for communicating research results but also for creative co-learning across policy, research and practice? How do journal reviewers respond to academics' and co-researchers' collaborative writing as inquiry? Do readers recognise graphic novels as products of, and sites for, the co-production of knowledge, or solely as popular dissemination?

## Note

<sup>1</sup> All transcribed workshop extracts, including haikus, have been translated from Danish by the authors.

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### Research ethics statement

All co-researchers gave their full written consent to participation in the research project and to the use of research material in research and research dissemination. Ethics approval from a board of ethics was not required for this article because it is not customary to obtain formal ethics approval from a board of ethics in Denmark.

### Contributor statement

LP wrote the first and subsequent drafts of the manuscript with comments from MBC-S and LF. LF and LP conceptualised the research project. LF, LP, and MBC-S designed the research study on which this article is based. LP constructed the article's theoretical framework and carried out data analysis and interpretation with contributions from MBC-S and LF.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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