

Article

# Adolescents' Subjective Views about Interprofessional Team Participation: A Q-methodological Study

by

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## Keywords:

adolescents, Q-methodology, subjectivity, interprofessional collaboration, service user involvement, social work.



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## Abstract

**Background:** One common arrangement in the Norwegian child welfare system is the interprofessional collaborating team, not unlike the English core group. This team is often referred to as the 'responsible team' (RT) and is arranged when a child has needs that call for several services. Few studies about interprofessional collaboration focus on views of service users and, in particular, those of child and adolescent service users.

**Aims and objectives:** The present study aims to explore adolescents' subjective views about their participation in RTs. This study contributes further knowledge about the field of interprofessional collaboration, especially regarding the participation of adolescents.

**Design:** Non-experimental, exploratory research design.

**Methods:** Q-methodology was used to explore 26 adolescents' subjective views about their collaboration within the responsible teams that were formed to support their welfare. Q-methodology is known as being particularly suitable for revealing vulnerable people's nuanced subjective views and perspectives. The adolescents in this study were asked to rank order a set of 42 statements (Q-set). PQMethod was used to analyse the data.

**Results:** Four factors emerged and revealed patterns of shared views among the adolescents. Factor 1: *Optimistic and engaged despite bad experiences*, Factor 2: *Strive to not be defeated by their helpers*, Factor 3: *Battle weary and resigned*, and Factor 4: *Content, positive and full of trust*.

**Implications:** The present study may be relevant to researchers, health and social policy makers, in addition to professionals working in services that aim to improve children's situations through interprofessional collaboration.

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## Introduction

### *Collaborative practice*

As in many other countries in the Western world, interprofessional collaboration (IPC) is both a health and social policy target, and a working tool in health and social services in Norway (Willumsen *et al.*, 2014). According to the World Health Organization (2010), collaborative practice happens when several health workers from different professions work together with patients, families and caregivers, as well as communities, to provide the highest quality of care. Aiming at enhanced effectiveness and improved accuracy in the provision of targeted services in accordance with the service users' needs, several models of collaboration teams have evolved in different countries (Reeves *et al.*, 2010).

The Norwegian 'Responsible Team' (RT) is one example of a collaborative practice arrangement. RT is a collaboration team model that has been commonly used in Norway for approximately 30 years (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2009). RTs are frequently used by the Norwegian Child Welfare Service (NCWS) (Ødegård *et al.*, 2014), which is required to collaborate with other agencies in order to meet children's complex needs (Norwegian Child Welfare Act of 1992, §3-2 and 2a). The child, the parents and other persons of significance are most often included as members of an RT, and they meet together for case conferences (Skivenes & Willumsen, 2005).

In recent times, there has been a shift in the practices of child welfare from a perspective of professionals working *for* a child, to professionals *collaborating with* a child (Ellingsen *et al.*, 2014). According to the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child §12 and the Norwegian Child Welfare Act §6-3, children have the right to express their views in cases concerning themselves. Despite the increasing amount of IPC research (Ødegård *et al.*, 2014), research focusing on children's and, especially, adolescents' perspectives on this approach, is still lacking (Cooper *et al.*, 2016). One reason for this is that the use of interchangeable terms in the field of IPC research makes it difficult to search for relevant previous research (Brown & White, 2006; Ødegård, 2006; Reeves *et al.*, 2010).

This study contributes knowledge about adolescent service users' subjective views to both the research and practice fields. The study uses several contested concepts that

exist in this research field, such as collaboration and culture. However, the application of the Q-methodology implies that the adolescent participants did not have to relate to these concepts, but rather to specific statements produced by other adolescents.

#### *Adolescents' participation in interprofessional teams*

Literature searches were conducted in MEDLINE, Academic Search Premier and SocINDEX with Full Text, targeting adolescents' perception of IPC and service user involvement, but produced few hits. Several strategies were applied, based on combining the following terms: (a) *interprofessional collaboration*, (b) *adolescent*, (c) *child welfare/child protection*, (d) *child mental health/psychiatry*, and (e) *service user involvement/participation*. Each of these terms was expanded by applying truncations and synonyms, with the aim being to retrieve as many relevant studies as possible. This resulted in only four references, of which none appeared to be relevant. Hand searches in relevant reference lists were also conducted, but the total number of relevant studies still seems very low. Although there is a possibility that flaws and limitations in the search strategy may have impaired the findings, more systematic research is needed in this field. A broader literature search strategy might have resulted in references to other studies that have dealt with service users' views in interprofessional work, from other disciplines and contexts, though not social work specifically (cf. Cooper & Spencer-Dawe, 2006; Shaw, 2008; Sitzia, Cotterell, & Richardson, 2006).

Oliver *et al.* (2010), O'Reilly *et al.* (2013), Bolin (2014; 2015) and Cooper *et al.* (2016) also emphasize the lack of studies, including opinions from children and adolescent service users, about IPC. Previous research in related fields does exist, such as studies focusing on perspectives of professionals (e.g. Gartska *et al.*, 2014; Hesjedal *et al.*, 2013; Ødegård & Strype, 2009), parents (e.g. Skivenes & Willumsen, 2005; Widmark *et al.*, 2013), and parents and children (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2013). Harris and Allen (2011) explored young people's experiences with public service multiagency working, but the young people had not been included as part of a team. Only two studies that focused on adolescents' perceptions about participation in IPC were identified.

The two studies identified were by Bolin (2014 and 2015), who based her studies on children's agency in IPC. According to Bolin (2014), children respond to IPC meetings

in child welfare work by pretending to be disengaged, and appearing to be present in body only. By adopting these mannerisms, they hide the fact that they notice the information exchanges, views, inequalities in power and their subordinated positions and restricted opportunities for input in these meetings (Bolin, 2014). According to Bolin, children use different strategies in order to impact decision making; hence, they are not actually powerless agents, but instead express agency.

A number of types of factors contribute to how well (or not) RTs are able to elicit collaboration and participation with the adolescents they seek to serve. We have found that the theoretical framework presented by Reeves *et al.* (2010) involves a range of factors, several of them having a high relevance for the present study. These factors are linked to four domains: *relational, processual, organizational and contextual*.

For example, relational factors include *professional power, hierarchy, trust and respect, and individual willingness*. Reeves *et al.* (2010) describe professional power as an important factor in interprofessional teams. Different forms of power exist within the team, and power among the members of a team will always be unequal. The hierarchy factor, which refers to the organization of the team, is closely related to the power factor. In his study conceptualizing relative distancing in interprofessional education, Green (2013) described hierarchical distancing as the way students ascribed authority and status to their own and other professions. Drawing on Green's (2013) concept, hierarchical distance may, for example, result in an adolescent being ascribed a very low status in the RT, which may then complicate integration of the adolescent in the RT. However, in hierarchical teams, seniors may disempower juniors, but the opposite may also happen.

Achievement of high levels of trust and respect is often based on team stability and close collaboration over a long time. A team member's achievement of other team members' trust is often based on that he has proven his abilities. A lack of respect is described as a key to conflict. When there is a lack of trust and respect among team members, there can be several causes: lack of understanding of each other, lack of commitment on some members' parts, and members holding differing team goals. Team members' willingness to collaborate is a crucial factor in whether or not the

collaboration will take place. Ostensible collaboration may occur, but is up to the individual team member whether to engage or not (Reeves *et al.*, 2010).

Examples of contextual factors are *culture* and *political will*. For example, the culture factor is concerned with behaviours, beliefs and values. Interprofessional teams create a local culture that affects how the team members interact, which may be of significance as to whose input is listened to. As pointed out by Green (2014), many countries express a *political will* to IPC, but supporting policy documents are often problematic. Documents may lack guidance about the development of teamwork activities, while additional underlying factors such as power and status imbalances seem envisaged (Reeves *et al.*, 2010).

## **Aims**

The present study is part of a larger research project, and builds upon elements of two previous studies (Sæbjørnsen & Willumsen, 2015; Sæbjørnsen *et al.*, 2016). The primary aim was to explore adolescents' subjective views about RTs, whereas a secondary aim was to discuss implications of the results on interprofessional teams' arrangements.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Twenty-six adolescents (11 male and 15 female) aged 13 to 18, who had service user experiences from RTs, participated in this study. All had complex health and social service needs, including needs for mental health services. NCWS had been involved with all of the adolescents for several years. Twenty of them had been placed in out-of-home care by the NCWS more than once. Of these, seven had been placed in care four times or more, and one had been placed 12 times.

The adolescents were recruited through the regional and municipal child welfare services, The Change Factory (Forandringsfabrikken in Norwegian), and also a private youth care foundation, provided out-of-home care. Of the invited adolescents, only one did not agree to participate in the study. All the adolescents lived in the western and

southern parts of Norway. Four of them lived with their birth parents, six in foster homes and 15 in children's homes and 'independent living'.

### *Q-methodology*

This study employed Q, a methodology which was developed for a scientific investigation of subjectivity, such as views, feelings and beliefs regarding a topic being investigated (Brown, 1980, 1991/1992). Q provides an innovative approach to qualitative analysis by the way qualitative data are quantified (Shemmings, 2006). The fact that Q allows participants to express their views without verbal elaboration makes it a method that is sufficient for obtaining perspectives of children or others who may find verbal elaboration cognitively or emotionally challenging (Ellingsen *et al.*, 2011).

This Q study comprised the following five steps commonly used in Q studies (Brown, 1991/1992; van Exel & de Graaf, 2005):

- Identification of the *concourse*, which constituted the point of departure for the development of the research tool. Brown (1991/1992) described the *concourse* as 'the universe of communicability surrounding any topic'. Interviews were used to approach identification of the *concourse* for this Q study.
- Development of the set of statements, called the Q-set or Q-sample. The statements were selected from interview texts and theory.
- Selection of P-set (the group of participants).
- Administration of the Q-sorts. The participants were asked to rank order the statements in a predefined grid, in accordance with the degree to which they agreed with the statements.
- Analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from Q-sorts and participants' comments during the sorting procedures.

The emerging factors revealed through a by-person factor analysis will disclose patterns of the participants' shared viewpoints. Different from data reduction models, in which the *items* are factor analysed, it is the person who is subjected to factor analysis in Q. Hence, Q is often referred to as a 'by-person factor analysis' and not a 'by-variable factor analysis' (Stephenson, 1936; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Each factor represents one main perspective among the participants, e.g. a comparison between

the different perspectives. The Q study process is described in further detail in the following sections.

### *Materials and procedure*

In order to identify the concourse for this study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five adolescents experienced with RTs were conducted. From the transcribed interview texts, a total of 258 statements were identified as belonging to the concourse about adolescent service users' perceptions of RTs.

The selection of statements for development of the Q-sample involved the application of a categorization tool called a *Concourse Box* (Sæbjørnsen *et al.*, 2016). The purpose was to reduce the number of statements to a manageable number for Q-sort, and to still ensure the inclusion of important aspects. As a result of this process, the number of statements gathered from interview texts was carefully reduced to 37. In addition, five statements were theoretically constructed and added, as some theoretical aspects seemed underrepresented among the statements from the interviews. The reason for adding statements based on theoretical aspects is that they can help point to matters of complexity missing from naturally voiced statements and thus, better enable the adolescent participants to provide their views (Sæbjørnsen *et al.*, 2016).

The Q-sample and Q-sort grid (Fig. 1) were tested by young adults who had previously been in situations similar to those of the participants in this study. Based on feedback from the test participants, a few statements were amended and the number of statements (42) was considered manageable for adolescent service users' Q-sorts. The Q-sample was presented to the participants on 42 statement cards, with one statement printed on each card. The participants were then asked to sort the statement cards into the Q-sort grid (Fig. 1) in accordance with the instruction: 'according to which degree you, in your situation, agree with the statement'. In order to simplify the sorting procedure, the participants first read through the statements and conducted a preliminary sort into three piles (*agree*, *disagree* and *neutral/uncertain*).



Factor designation is based on the factor interpretation. For further and well-described information about factor analysis in Q-methodology, see Watts and Stenner (2012).

### *Ethical considerations*

Approvals were obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD; Project Number 30256). Initially, the participants were informed both verbally and in writing about the research project. The participants and the parents of those under the age of 16 gave their written consent. They were informed that all information from the adolescents, such as how they sorted the cards and their verbal comments, would be treated anonymously. In conformance with the NSD's procedures, the audio recordings would be deleted.

### **Findings and preliminary discussions**

A principal component analysis with a Varimax rotation resulted in four factors (Table 2). The correlation between the factors was low (Table 1), indicating the presence of differing perspectives:

**Table 1: Four factor correlation matrix**

|    | F1     | F2      | F3     | F4     |
|----|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| F1 | 1.0000 |         |        |        |
| F2 | 0.1977 | 1.0000  |        |        |
| F3 | 0.1606 | 0.2279  | 1.0000 |        |
| F4 | 0.4618 | -0.1014 | 0.1778 | 1.0000 |

The factor loadings indicate the degree to which each Q-sort correlates with each of the four factors, as shown in Table 2. An X marks a Q-sort loading significantly on one factor. The closer a Q-sort is to 1, the more equal it is to the factor:

**Table 2:Factor matrix with an X indicating a defining sort**

| Q-sort          | F1       | F2       | F3       | F4       |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1               | 0.1883   | - 0.2153 | 0.4451   | 0.5390 X |
| 2               | 0.5438 X | 0.2773   | 0.4218   | 0.0283   |
| 3               | 0.0887   | 0.5820 X | 0.1845   | - 0.0828 |
| 4               | 0.1964   | - 0.0630 | 0.6686 X | 0.0605   |
| 5               | 0.5444 X | 0.1600   | 0.1114   | 0.3170   |
| 6               | 0.1377   | 0.4880 X | - 0.1262 | 0.0463   |
| 7               | 0.2679   | 0.6708 X | 0.1935   | - 0.2668 |
| 8               | - 0.1051 | 0.2148   | 0.6101 X | - 0.3648 |
| 9               | 0.0011   | 0.6204 X | - 0.3206 | 0.3545   |
| 10              | 0.4866   | 0.5958 X | 0.1833   | - 0.1789 |
| 11              | 0.5550 X | 0.2120   | 0.1885   | 0.3952   |
| 12              | - 0.0472 | 0.2487   | 0.7803 X | 0.2529   |
| 13              | 0.4686 X | - 0.1864 | 0.1031   | 0.2066   |
| 14              | 0.4457 X | 0.1685   | 0.1547   | 0.0986   |
| 15              | 0.2816   | - 0.0489 | - 0.1741 | 0.5404 X |
| 16              | 0.4942 X | - 0.4492 | - 0.1091 | 0.1664   |
| 17              | 0.0790   | - 0.1772 | 0.3740   | 0.4818 X |
| 18              | 0.3981   | - 0.3359 | - 0.1410 | 0.6390 X |
| 19              | 0.6037 X | 0.1851   | - 0.2267 | 0.0136   |
| 20              | 0.5814 X | 0.0348   | - 0.0103 | 0.0729   |
| 21              | 0.1995   | - 0.1864 | 0.1824   | 0.7750 X |
| 22              | 0.0993   | 0.4320 X | 0.1165   | 0.0952   |
| 23              | 0.4470   | 0.0651   | - 0.1063 | 0.6656 X |
| 24              | - 0.2049 | 0.3785   | 0.1034   | 0.7880 X |
| 25              | - 0.0170 | 0.7347 X | - 0.1711 | - 0.0671 |
| 26              | - 0.1442 | 0.7040 X | 0.2739   | - 0.3065 |
| Expl.variance % | 12       | 15       | 10       | 15       |

Eight of the 26 participants define Factor 1, as they loaded significantly on this factor. Eight define Factor 2, three define Factor 3 and seven define Factor 4.

A common approach in Q is a visual inspection of the factors. The resulting factor scores (z scores) were converted back to the original values of the scale used in the factor matrix. Table 3 shows how each of the statements was typically sorted by each of the four factors:

**Table 3:Factor scores for each of the 42 statements**

| No. | Q-sort statements   | Factor arrays |            |            |            |
|-----|---|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
|     |   | 1             | 2          | 3          | 4          |
| 1   | My participation, with my opinions, is more important than the others' participation, with their opinions.  | 4             | 5          | 0          | 0          |
| 2   | I may participate in the decisions about who may be involved in the RT.   | - 3           | - 3        | - 4        | 0          |
| 3   | I would prefer the conferences to be held somewhere else.   | - 4           | 0          | - 2        | - 4        |
| 4   | I know that I may participate a lot in the decision making if I want to.  | - 1           | - 1        | 0          | <u>4</u>   |
| 5   | I feel sure that all the persons involved in the RT intend to work for my best possible outcome.  | 3             | - 3        | 0          | 2          |
| 6   | It frequently happens that decisions to which I disagree are taken in the RT conferences.   | <u>0</u>      | 3          | 4          | <u>- 3</u> |
| 7   | Nothing actually comes out of the RT conferences for me.  | - 4           | 3          | <u>- 1</u> | <u>- 5</u> |
| 8   | Once you get involved with the NCWS, you are stuck with them forever.   | - 3           | 4          | 4          | - 3        |
| 9   | Without these RT conferences, I would have been worse off than I am today.  | 0             | <u>- 3</u> | 1          | <u>4</u>   |
| 10  | I know several other kids and young people who, - like me, have RT conferences.   | 3             | <u>- 1</u> | <u>2</u>   | - 4        |
| 11* | I think my experiences are very important for those who develop services for kids and adolescents.  | 2             | 3          | 1          | 0          |
| 12  | I like to attend the RT conferences.  | 1             | <u>- 5</u> | 1          | <u>- 2</u> |
| 13  | I think my parents would like to join the RT conferences.   | <u>5</u>      | <u>1</u>   | - 3        | - 2        |
| 14  | I think we have the RT conferences too often.   | <u>- 5</u>    | - 2        | - 2        | - 3        |
| 15  | It is difficult to speak in the RT conferences because so many people are present.  | - 1           | <u>2</u>   | - 2        | - 3        |
| 16  | I have one or more professionals 'on my side' who see to it that what I want emerges in the RT conferences.   | 4             | <u>- 2</u> | 5          | 5          |
| 17  | I think it's good that what we talk about is written down.  | 3             | 1          | 3          | <u>- 1</u> |
| 18  | I frequently get my way when I say what I mean.   | - 2           | - 4        | - 4        | <u>- 1</u> |
| 19  | I'm anxious that NCWS will decide things that I don't agree with, for example, that I have to move and stuff.   | <u>- 2</u>    | <u>4</u>   | <u>5</u>   | <u>1</u>   |
| 20  | RT conferences have been a good way to solve problems.  | 0             | <u>- 3</u> | 0          | <u>3</u>   |
| 21* | I long to become 18 years old because then I can make decisions on my own, for example, if I want to live on my own.                                  | 3             | <u>2</u>   | 3          | 2          |
| 22  | I think it is all right if the other pupils know that I have these RT conferences.  | 2             | - 1        | 1          | - 2        |
| 23  | I decide myself whether I want to attend the RT conferences.  | 3             | <u>- 1</u> | 3          | 1          |
| 24  | I think the chairperson in the RT conferences does a good job.  | 1             | - 1        | - 2        | 1          |
| 25* | I think the timing of the RT conferences is ok.   | - 1           | 1          | 0          | 1          |
| 26  | Before the RT conferences, I use to talk to a professional whom I trust about how I am doing, what we are going to talk about in the conference, etc. | 0             | <u>- 2</u> | 0          | <u>2</u>   |
| 27  | It happens that persons who are present at the RT conferences pass on things from the conferences which they should keep confidential.                | - 2           | 0          | - 1        | - 5        |
| 28  | I think there is a good atmosphere in the RT conferences.   | <u>1</u>      | - 4        | - 2        | - 2        |
| 29  | When decisions have been made in the RT conferences, I always comply with them.   | - 2           | <u>- 5</u> | - 1        | 0          |
| 30  | At school, I get treated the same way as pupils who are not involved with the NCWS.   | 2             | 1          | <u>- 1</u> | 1          |
| 31  | I find that the way the RT conferences are chaired influences a lot of what we achieve.   | 0             | 2          | 2          | 0          |

|                    |  |            |          |            |            |
|--------------------|--|------------|----------|------------|------------|
| 32                 | I think the RT conferences will impact my future choices, like, for example, about getting an education.   | <u>- 5</u> | 0        | <u>2</u>   | 0          |
| 33                 | I think the RT conferences would have been better if I were the chairperson myself.  | <u>- 3</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>3</u>   | <u>- 4</u> |
| 34                 | I'm aware of why the different individuals are present in the RT conferences.  | 2          | 1        | 1          | 3          |
| 35                 | I think the RT conferences last too long.  | - 4        | <u>4</u> | - 3        | <u>- 1</u> |
| 36                 | I believe that all the persons present in the RT conferences are genuinely interested in my opinion.   | <u>- 1</u> | - 4      | - 5        | <u>2</u>   |
| 37                 | I believe that all the adults in the RT conferences like each other.   | <u>1</u>   | <u>3</u> | <u>- 4</u> | <u>- 1</u> |
| 38                 | In the RT conferences, we talk about things that I find important for the improvement of my situation.   | 4          | <u>0</u> | <u>2</u>   | 5          |
| 39                 | I have frequently made suggestions in the RT conferences that have resulted in an improvement of my situation.   | - 1        | - 2      | - 3        | <u>3</u>   |
| 40                 | To achieve good results, I think it is more important that I like the personality of the persons involved than whether they are skilful professionals. | 5          | 5        | <u>- 1</u> | <u>3</u>   |
| 41                 | The quality of the solutions we arrive at in RT conferences is highly related to the degree to which the RT is used to collaborate.                    | <u>1</u>   | 2        | 4          | 4          |
| 42                 | I would find it difficult if my caseworker quit.   | 0          | 0        | <u>- 5</u> | - 1        |
| Explained variance |  | 12%        | 15%      | 10%        | 15%        |

*Note:* Values with underlining represent distinguishing statement values for the specific factor at significance level  $p < 0.5$ . *Distinguishing statements* refers to key viewpoints in each factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012), and to their being significantly unique for each specific factor. The distinguishing statements are underlined factor scores in Table 3. For example, it is typical and unique for participants associated with Factor 3 to have a statement number 42 on -5. Statements marked \* represent consensus statements. Only statements 11, 21 and 25 are marked as consensus statements, which means that they are ranked quite similar in all the factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

### *Factor interpretation*

The interpretations presented below are not absolute explanations of the adolescents' perceptions, but rather the results of our search for the best plausible explanations of the adolescents' subjective understanding that the factors represent (Stephenson, 1961; Wolf, 2004). In line with this, the designation of the factors was based on the interpretation of each factor, but, undoubtedly, other designations might also have been appropriate.

#### *Factor 1: Optimistic and engaged despite bad experiences*

This factor was labelled, *Optimistic and engaged despite bad experiences*, because the adolescents seemed enthusiastically involved in the RT conferences, even though they seemed to have previously had some negative experiences. Comments during the Q-sort, such as, 'It hasn't always been like this', supported the impression that their optimism and trust might be rooted in new, positive experiences. Still, these adolescents seem a little sceptical, which may indicate that they had had some

previous negative experiences in mind. Eight participants correlated significantly with Factor 1, which explains 12% of the total variance.

The configuration of the statements on Factor 1 may indicate that the adolescents associated with it trusted the professionals' intentions to work for the adolescents' best interests (statement #5/+3). They seem less anxious than other factors that the NCWS would make decisions they would disagree with, though some scepticism may remain (statement #19/-2). They do not seem to worry about the NCWS being difficult to get rid of (statement #8/-3), and they seem inclined to find the atmosphere in the RT conferences to be all right (statement #28/+1). These adolescents also seem to find it rather important to preserve the contents in the RT conferences in report documents (statement #17/+3).

The adolescents' loading on Factor 1 gave the impression of their being quite satisfied with the RT conferences concerning meeting place (statement #3/-4), time (statement #25/-1), duration (statement #35/-4), subjects (statement #38/+4) and outcomes for themselves (statement #7/-4). More than any other factor, these adolescents expressed a belief that their parents would like to join the RT conferences (statement #13/+5), but comments during the Q-sort indicated that this was not always the case for all of them. The adolescents did not give the impression that they enjoyed attending the RT conferences (statement #12/+1), although they might have wished that the conferences were held more often (statement #14/-5). Despite the faith that they assumingly had in the RT, they did not get their way very often (statement #18/-2), and they may have had some doubts that all the participants in the RT conferences were really interested in their opinions (statement #36/-1). They seem quite sure that the most important opinions in the RT conferences were their own (statement #1/+4), and they seem to find RT members' personalities an important factor in having good results in RT conferences (statement #40/+5).

*Factor 2: Strive to not be defeated by their helpers*

Adolescents' loading on Factor 2 seems to felt run over, worked against, not listened to, and disrespected. They seem to doubt that the RT members intended to work for their best interests (statement #5/-3), and that RT members were interested in their opinions (statement #36/-4). These adolescents do not seem to perceive having had

a professional speaking for them in the RT conferences (statement #16/-4), and they might not have had a trusting relationship with any of the professional RT members (statement #26/-2). However, they seem to think that the other RT members liked each other (statement #37/-4).

Factor 2 gives the impression that these adolescents perceive that the NCWS is hard to get rid of (statement #8/+4), and that they are afraid of the power of the NCWS (statement #19/+4).

These adolescents expressed negative sentiments about attending the RT conferences (statement #12/-5 and #28/-4), which they seem to think had not been of much help (statement #7/+3 and #9/-3). They do not seem to have found the subjects addressed in the RT conferences highly relevant (statement #38/0). The adolescents expressed the opinion that RT conferences lasted too long (statement #35/+4) and were not particularly appropriate for problem solving (statement #20/-3), and they may have felt that too many people attended them (statement #15/+2). They perceived likely having little influence on decision making (statement #4/-1), and that the decision about whether they would attend RT conferences was not entirely up to them to make (statement #23/-1). Possible indications that these adolescents have a 'fighting spirit' are that they seemed to not comply with RT conference decisions (statement #29/-5), and that they perceived that their experiences constitute information useful to policymakers (statement #11/+3).

### *Factor 3: Battle weary and resigned*

Three participants loaded on Factor 3. They seemed to feel worked against and not listened to. They seemed battle weary and resigned, and possibly more mature than those associated with the other factors. Factor 3 has commonalities with Factor 2, but there are also some evident differences. More than the other factors, these adolescents seemed to fear the power of the NCWS (statement #19/+5) and felt that NCWS was difficult to get rid of (statement #8/+4). Rating statement #42 at -5 may indicate that they would have preferred that their caseworker had quit.

Factor 3 seems to indicate that the adolescents believed that the RT was uninterested in their opinions (statement #36/-5), and that the parents disliked attending the RT

conferences (statement #13/-3). They expressed that they frequently disagreed with the RTs (statement #6/+4). These adolescents expressed having had poor experiences when making suggestions that had improved their situations (statement #39/-3), and that they lacked influence on RT composition (statement #2/-4). Placing statement #37 on column -4 indicates that they perceived that the adult RT members liked each other and perhaps that they felt not included in the group solidarity, yet they do not seem to have been very incoherent concerning RT decisions (statement #29/-1). The ranking of the statement about whether they liked to attend RT conferences (statement #12/1) may indicate carelessness or perhaps the loss of a previous 'fighting spirit'. Factor 3 indicates that the adolescents knew about other adolescents who were in situations similar to themselves (statement #10/+2). At school, they may have felt they were treated somewhat differently than other pupils (statement #30/-1).

Factor 3 seems to imply that the adolescents perceived the chairing of RT conferences to be somewhat important for achieving results (statement #31/+2), but they were not impressed by the chairperson's job (statement #24/-2). More than in the case of any of the other factors, these adolescents seem to imply that RT conferences would have been improved if they themselves had chaired the conferences (statement #33/+3).

Interestingly, these adolescents seem convinced that they had at least one professional on their side who was voicing their concerns (statement #16/+5). However, comments made during the Q-sort, regarding things having changed lately, may imply that these relationships had been established only recently.

#### *Factor 4: Content, positive and full of trust*

The configuration of the statements on Factor 4 gives a strong impression that the adolescents loading on it are satisfied, positive and active in the RT, and that they trust their helpers. They seem to perceive that at least one professional voiced their concerns (statement #16/+5) and, to some extent, that they had a trusting relationship with a professional (statement #26/+2).

These adolescents do not seem to doubt their possibilities for participating extensively in the decision-making (statement #4/+4), and to some degree they may have been able to get their way (statement #18/-1). They seem to have often agreed with the RT's

decisions (statement #6/-3), and to have felt that their situation improved as result of suggestions they themselves made (statement #39/+3). Less so than in the case of the other factors, these adolescents seem to have protested the RT's decisions, although they did not absolutely comply with them (statement #29/0). More than in the other factors, these adolescents seem to have been involved in the composition of the RT (statement #2/0), and the number of attendees did not seem to particularly bother them (statement #15/-3).

More than the other adolescents, Factor 4 adolescents seem to perceive RT members as having been genuinely interested in their opinions (statement #36/+2), and that these other members were true to client confidentiality (statement #27/+5). They seem to perceive that the subjects in RT conferences were very relevant (statement #38/+5), that RT conferences were appropriate for problem solving (statement #20/+3) and were useful to themselves (statement #7/-5). These adolescents would probably have perceived their current situations worse without the RT conferences (statement #9/+4). They also seemed to have a good understanding of the RT's composition (statement #34/+3), and believe that it would probably have been a bad idea to put an adolescent in the chairperson role (statement #33/-4).

Typically, the adolescents associated with Factor 4 did not seem to know many others in a situation like their own (statement #10/-4), and they probably disliked everyone at school knowing about their situation (statement 22/-2).

## **Discussion**

### *Subjective views of collaboration and participation*

In this article, we have presented some adolescent service users' subjective perspectives about collaboration in RTs. A commonality of two of the perspectives, Factor 1 and Factor 4 (cf. correlation between F1 and F4 was 0.46), is that the adolescents seem to trust the RT and perceive it as useful. Strikingly different from these are the perspectives represented by Factors 2 and 3, both of which reveal perceptions of RT as rather useless. These adolescents seem to distrust the RT, as well as feel disrespected and not listened to.

The description of these four factors is especially interesting in the RT context, because the findings show that adolescents' subjective views do not necessarily discriminate between collaboration and participation. Could this indicate that adolescents perceive RTs differently from the professionals? Professionals probably participate in RTs because they believe they may be able to contribute knowledge and services that will assist in improving the adolescent users' situations. On the other hand, the adolescents attend because they need help to handle complex difficulties in their personal lives. The findings in this study indicate that whether the adolescents evaluated RTs positively or negatively, they attend RT conferences because their personal lives and future are at issue. Hence, the RT conferences should be more important to the adolescents than to any other RT member, but although all the adolescents in this study attend the RT conferences, the degree to which they involve themselves or are allowed to be involved differs.

For example, the adolescents loading on Factor 4 in particular, but also on Factor 1, seem to find the subjects in the RT conferences to be of personal interest, and they personally appreciate the outcome of the RT's collaboration. The adolescents associated with both of these factors seem to feel heard and supported by professionals whom they trusted in the RT conferences. Referring to Reeves *et al.* (2010) and Green (2013), these positive perceptions may indicate that the RT succeeded in developing a *culture* that adolescents feel a part of and where their inputs are welcome. It is likely that the adolescents' participation constitutes an explicit value in these RTs' cultures. The perspectives represented by Factor 2 and Factor 3 seem based on experiences with RTs that have not succeeded in developing such an adolescent-friendly culture. The shift from working *for* children in need to *collaborating with* them (Ellingsen *et al.*, 2014) might have been accomplished to a great extent in the RTs of the adolescents represented by Factors 1 and 4. Accordingly, Factor 2 and Factor 3 may indicate that such a shift was not successfully accomplished in these RTs.

The findings in this study demonstrate that the adolescents perceive their personal difficulties as complex, and that they need help to improve their personal situations. Although some adolescents might even feel that the professional 'help' has been

forced on them, they still seem willing to participate because the RT is concerned with their personal life and future.

*Implications for interprofessional team arrangements*

All four perspectives in this study (Factors 1, 2, 3 and 4) show that power, trust and respect highly affected the adolescent service users' perception of RTs. Accordingly, *power, trust* and *respect* constitute important relational factors that also affect professionals' perception of IPC (Reeves *et al.*, 2010). In line with Reeves *et al.*, the adolescent perspectives in this study show that these factors intertwine with many other relational factors in the perception of RTs.

Factor 4, which represents the most content and positive of the adolescents, gives the impression of their having had a relatively powerful position in their RTs and a trusting relationship with at least one professional RT member. Despite the likelihood that these adolescents had the hierarchically lowest status and were the least experienced members of the RTs, they seem to have been involved in decision making to some degree and they did not feel controlled by the RT. This may be an indication that they have been empowered by 'seniors' in their RT, even though *hierarchy*, which is a factor closely related to power, involves a risk of 'seniors' disempowering 'juniors' (Green, 2013; Reeves *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, hierarchy may also have positively affected the adolescents represented by Factor 1. They seem to trust and be unafraid of the professionals' power, though they may not perceive themselves as having had much influence in the RT yet. Factors 2 and 3 represent the adolescents who express themselves most negatively about RT. They perceive having had very little influence in the RT and their levels of trust seem very low.

Adolescents' perceptions of being recognized convey the presence of mutual respect, which is important for the development of trust (Reeves *et al.*, 2010). This seems to have happened with Factor 4 and, to some degree, with Factor 1. In contrast, adolescents related to Factors 2 and 3 do not give any impression of feeling recognized by the RT. Rather, they seem to perceive a mutual disrespect.

Factor 2 and Factor 3 may perceive powerlessness in the RT, but according to Bolin (2015) children are not powerless in IPC conferences. She suggests that children

exercise power in ways such as refusing to attend meetings if they do not get their way (Bolin, 2015). The indication of a 'fighting spirit' found in Factor 2 may be understood as being in line with adolescents' expression of agency as described by Bolin (2015). However, this kind of power is not based on recognition and respect from the other members, but instead indicates an exercise of power for resistance (Foucault, 1978). Most likely, such power will not foster positivity and perceptions of recognition, trust and respect.

The great differences in how adolescents perceive RTs may indicate that the *political will* to provide interprofessional collaborative service is not sufficient; guidance also needs to be provided, instead of leaving it up to each RT to find out how to involve the adolescent (Green, 2014; Reeves *et al.*, 2010). Nonetheless, it is ultimately the individual RT member who has the power to decide whether the collaboration is going to happen. RTs may be established and RT conferences may be accomplished, but it is up to the individual RT member to engage or not. In other words, well-functioning RTs cannot be enforced from above. They must be rooted in the different professionals', as well as the adolescents', *willingness* to engage. According to Reeves and colleagues, professionals' resistance to IPC may be deeply anchored in their early professional socialization processes. This may be an argument for including both IPC and service user involvement early in the educational trajectory for all health and social professions.

The fact that several studies focus on professionals' evaluations of IPC, while adolescent service users' perceptions are hardly represented, raises the question of a definition of power. Who should be entitled to determine whether an IPC team has succeeded in contributing to improvement in an adolescent's situation or whether an RT has been successful or not? As we understand it, adolescent service users' views should be emphasized in such evaluations. Accordingly, they should be more involved in IPC research.

The findings in this study support Sæbjørnsen and Willumsen's (2015) contention that affording adolescents a high degree of participant power (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009) and trust seems to have the potential to strengthen their sense of engagement, positivity and perceptions of RTs' usefulness. Interestingly, adolescents in this study

seem to perceive RTs as useful when they are characterized by successful IPC and service user participation. In line with the aims of RTs, successful RTs seem to have the potential to improve adolescents' complex and difficult situations. In contrast, half-hearted efforts to develop trust and share power among RT members, as Factor 2 and Factor 3 illuminate, render the RT useless and just a waste of time. Therefore, we suggest that whole-heartedness in power sharing, as well as in the development of mutual trust and respect, should be pursued in RTs.

### **Limitations of the study**

The limitations of this study are connected to the aim of Q, which is to explore patterns of subjectivity. In line with many other research methods, Q does not intend to develop general knowledge about a population. Therefore, that this study did not generate knowledge necessarily prevails regarding all adolescent service users of RTs. Rather, it brings clarity and adds new dimensions to issues that other methods may have difficulty uncovering (Donner, 2001).

As with all human undertakings and data interpretation, this study may involve biases caused by the authors' pre-conceptions (Lykkeslet & Gjengedal, 2007). Hoping to counteract such biases, we have thoroughly discussed the results several times and involved research colleagues in these discussions.

Although the adolescent participants in this Q study were only asked to relate to the statements produced by other adolescents, and not to contested concepts such as collaboration and culture, a conceptual discussion could have been an interesting addition in this study. It would also have been interesting to involve adolescent service users in such a discussion.

### **Concluding remarks**

How adolescents subjectively view their experiences with RTs has been explored in this Q study, and the results have raised important questions about the significance of listening to young peoples' experiences with collaboration in interprofessional team arrangements. The purpose of RTs will always be to contribute good quality, coordinated services for children and young people in vulnerable positions. Within this landscape, the children or adolescents themselves are important co-actors.

Key findings in this study indicate that adolescents tend to find RTs useful in improving their situations if they feel welcome and if successful IPC, in addition to achieving a successful service user participation. The primary conditions for achieving these outcomes seem to be benevolence towards the adolescent, a balance of power and a mutual trust and respect among the RT members.

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