

## Reflections on Self-in-Relation (4)

In my perception, the project with the Social Interaction Group was a less challenging experience concerning my relationship with the participants than the prior projects. I think this is because my role was slightly different from that of the prior projects. In this project with the Social Interaction Group, I was implementing the PARTNER intervention instead of developing it. As such, my explicit role was to be the facilitator of the PARTNER intervention. At the same time, I was also evaluating together with the participants what this intervention meant to them. In that role as researcher I could now relate to my insights about what it means to be a transformative researcher and put them into practice. Also, I had developed more knowledge on participation and empowerment. Furthermore, I had learned that participation is a dynamic process.

When the narratives of the residents in the group were mainly focussed on negative experiences with social interaction, and I started to feel that we were going to end up in a negative spiral, I explicitly shared with the group of residents that I thought it was valuable to take an appreciative approach. I illustrated this by sharing my story about how the Taste Buddies got stuck in only talking about complaints and negative experiences, how I shared my doubts and frustrations about this with them, and how we broke through those dynamics. The Social Interaction Group decided, after hearing this example, that it could work for them as well to focus more on possibilities and their dreams of how things could be.

I found it quite funny to discover that in this group of residents, there was one male resident who really reminded me of 'Mr. De Graaf'. He too had this very critical way of looking at the organization and the same strong drive to wanting to contribute to the empowerment and wellbeing of residents. He also adhered strongly to the need to democratize residential care homes, just like Mr. De Graaf. Furthermore, the way he approached me, looking for support of his opinions and expressing his hopes that I could help to improve client participation, reminded me immediately of the dynamic relationship between me and Mr. De Graaf. I felt that this would be a good way for practising how to stay open to his stories and demands, and at the same time conscious about the borders of my responsibility to solve the issues he distinguished. I also was conscious not to feel personally responsible for the success of solving

issues. I watched his role in the resident action group, and when I saw that he tended to become dominant in the discussions, I tactfully made sure that other residents could share their perspectives as well. Fortunately, this client was also open to hear other perspectives and engaged in respectful discussions with the other residents. When he urged me that some issues should be solved, I brought this back to the group and made these issues topics of shared discussion. Towards the manager, who informally asked me how I felt this client acted in the group and how I thought she should reflect on his role in the resident council, I shared my observations with her. With the dynamics of the care improvement team and Mr. De Graaf and my pitfall of ending up as an advocate for the client in mind, I consciously shaped my role of multiple partiality: thus, I pointed at the client's motives and values as well as on my understanding of this manager's concerns related to this resident's attitude. I had the feeling that I started to understand the balance between 'me being myself' and me as a professional researcher better. From this project I learned that a clear distinction between 'me being myself' and 'me being a researcher' does not have to be made. I learned that a researcher can develop partnership with the people he/she works with especially when the researcher is aware of his/her own personal pitfalls and challenges, for example concerning feeling of responsibility. This insight in 'me being myself' helps to become a transformative researcher who starts to share responsibilities and creates space for partnership relations to develop.

During this research project, gaining insight in the meaning of the PARTNER intervention for those involved was my own research aim. I created a research partnership with the participants by sharing my findings and analysis with the participants by member checking of the interviews and by organizing focus groups. The core of our partnership related to my role as a facilitator of the PARTNER intervention, not to my role as a researcher.